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ANDY TAYLOR

ON HIS NEW SOLO LP AND REUNION WITH DURAN DURAN

DEXYS

"OUR JOB IS TO KEEP MOVING FORWARDS"

RICK ASTLEY

ALBUM NO.9 SNEAK PREVIEW

"THERE'S MORE TWANG TO THIS RECORD"

WORLD EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

WHAM!

ANDREW RIDGELEY + PEPSI & SHIRLIE ON LIFE IN A POP WHIRLWIND

"THE GROUP WAS OUR FRIENDSHIP SET TO MUSIC"

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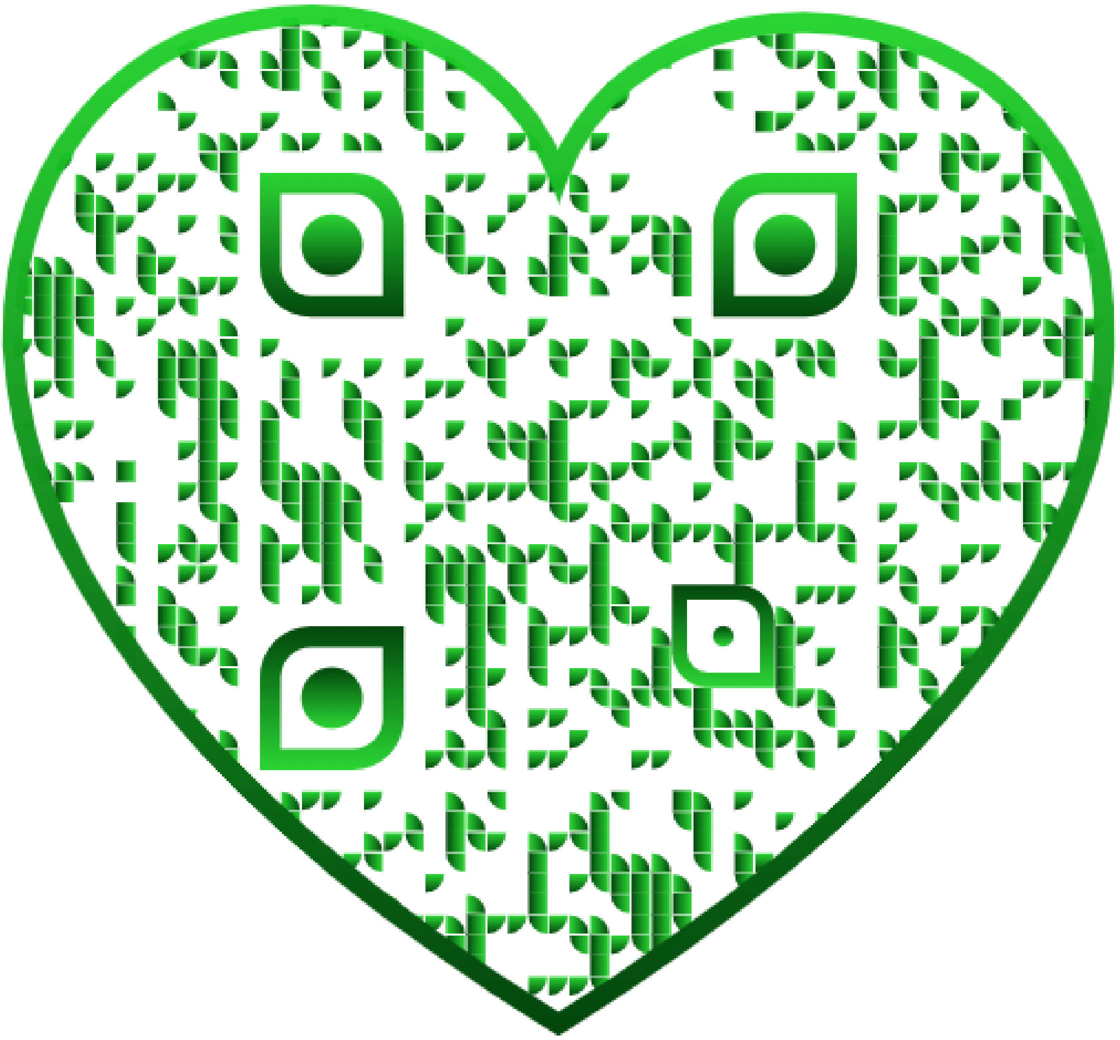

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CLASSIC POP

WELCOME

I've said it before in the pages of *Classic Pop* and I'll say it again – George Michael was the finest pure pop songwriter Britain has ever produced since Paul McCartney in his 60s Beatles pomp.

While's George's melodic genius allowed him to craft musical gems pretty much from the get-go – he famously wrote *Careless Whisper* as a 17-year-old, of course – he didn't arrive straight out of the box as a fully-formed performer. Wham! was effectively his pop star finishing school, and played a pivotal role in building his all-round confidence. In the space of just five years, the group enjoyed an extraordinary evolution yet it still wasn't enough to contain the enormity and ambition of George's talent.

A band of brothers and sisters, Wham! remain absolutely vital to George's ensuing success as a global solo star. As you'll see in our world exclusive interview with Andrew Ridgeley plus Pepsi & Shirlie this issue that coincides with the release of new Wham! singles compilations and a Netflix documentary, they were all learning the ropes together as performers.

From their first steps as a last-minute replacement for (in all likelihood) Wah! Heat on *Top Of The Pops* to perform *Young Guns (Go For It)* all the way through to their triumphant parting shot at Wembley Stadium, this was a group that was marked out by their close friendship.

And the warmth that Andrew, Pepsi and Shirlie still feel among themselves, for George, and for the band itself, is wonderful to read.

If that is isn't enough to tug at your heartstrings, we also have an inspirational exclusive interview with Andy Taylor this issue. Once more back in the Duran Duran fold having worked on their next studio album, despite his stage four pancreatic cancer diagnosis Andy remains both defiant and optimistic. In addition to working on Duran's upcoming Halloween-themed covers record he also has a solo LP of his own in the can, the terrific *Man's A Wolf To A Man*, which is all set to see the light of day next year.

Elsewhere, we serve up a sneak preview of Rick Astley's latest album (working title, *Are We There Yet?*). In fact, we're so quick off the mark it's not even finished yet. We were granted a private audience with pop's greatest quiff owner to hear the works-in-progress on his mobile phone. How about that for being ahead of the curve...

Enjoy the issue!

Steve Harnell, Editor

Follow me on Twitter: @steve_harnell

Steve

82

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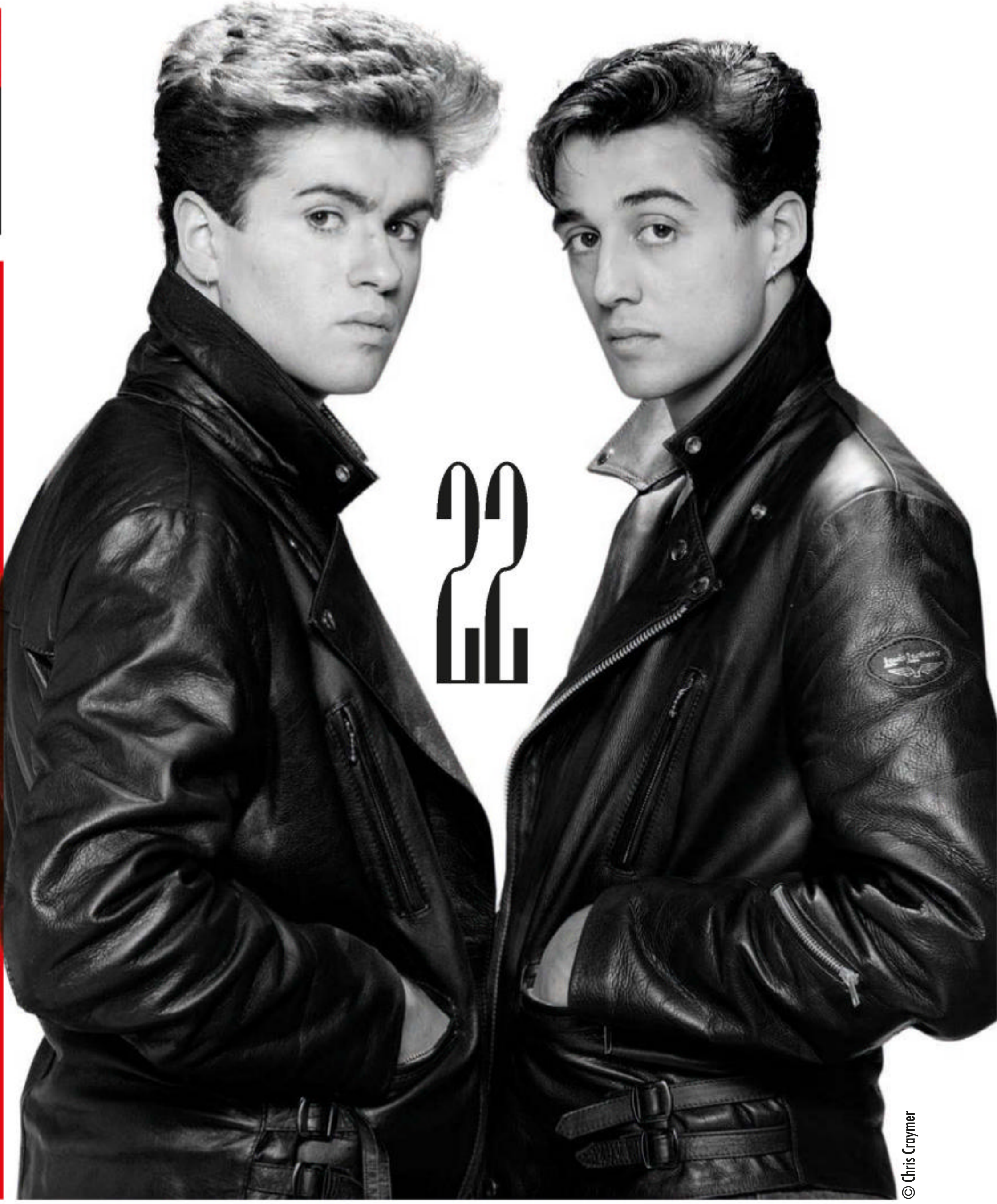
Subscribe to *Classic Pop* now and you'll receive a special Wham! collectable cover. These stripped-back designs dispense with the usual coverlines and make the most of our stunning artist imagery. Turn to pages 8 and 9 for details about how to subscribe and our latest reader offer.

CLASSIC POP

CONTENTS

82



22

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48

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FEATURES

WHAM! 22
With a new singles collection in the offing, Andrew Ridgeley plus Pepsi & Shirlie reflect on the group's heyday and the emergence of 'Yog', aka George Michael, as a pop legend

CLASSIC ALBUM 30
We examine Kate Bush's slow-burning masterpiece, *The Sensual World*

ANDY TAYLOR 36
Duran Duran's original guitarist speaks to *CP* about his forthcoming solo LP, the days of Duranmania – and his reunion with the iconic pop outfit

ALBUM BY ALBUM 42
From their self-titled Top 5 debut, through the megastardom and rough patches, Duran Duran have fashioned a totally unique back catalogue

THE LILAC TIME 48
Classic Pop meets Stephen Duffy to discuss his new – and possibly finest – collection with The Lilac Time

RICK ASTLEY 54
The 80s favourite gives us a sneak preview of his new album and reveals all about *that* Moz-related reinvention

FORGET ME NOTS 60
Elvis Costello's critically lauded, southern-fried LP, *The Delivery Man*

DEXYS 62
Kevin Rowland talks *Classic Pop* through his grand awakening and how Dexys put it to music...

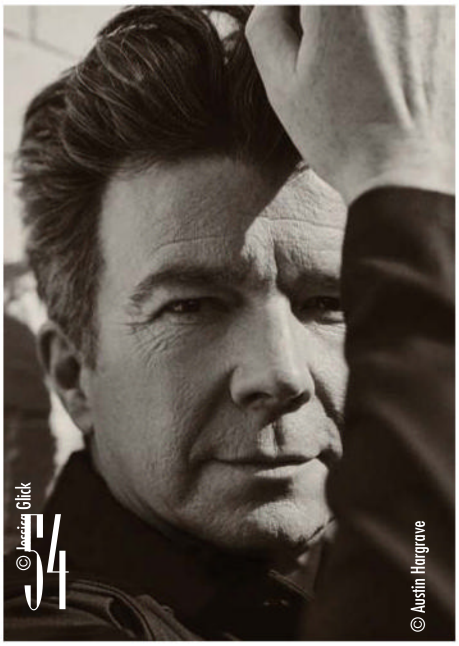
TOP 20 LIVERPUDLIAN SINGLES 68
Our personal countdown of the best of Liverpool's 80s singles

POPSCENE 74
Acid Jazz bottled up a heady brew of jazz, hip-hop and upbeat sounds

NEWS

POP-UP 10
Kylie, Liam Gallagher, Primal Scream – and we remember Tina Turner

Q+A: PAUL HARDCASTLE 12
N-n-n-nineteen and a *TOTP* theme...



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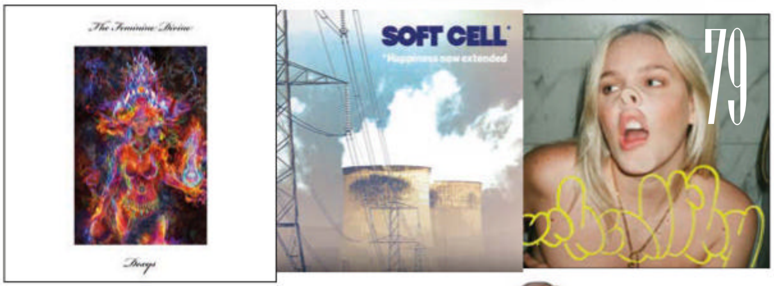
PAGES 8-9



1-HIT WONDER 14
Blue Mercedes reach UK No.23 with *I Want To Be Your Property*

LOST & FOUND 16
The Drum Is Everything by Carmel

A TO Z OF POP 18
Is there a particular musical magic to the double-digit years?

REGULARS

THIS MONTH IN POP 20
Tracy Chapman arrives, Ike enters the slammer and MJ unleashes *Bad*...

TOP 10: 7 JULY 1990 52
A mixed bag of classics from *Nessun Dorma* to Hammer Time

SUPERFAN 72
Shakespears Sister-lover Andrei Kamov

CLASSIC POP MOMENT 98
Sade release their classy debut LP

REVIEWS

THE HOT LIST 78
Suede at 30, The Coral, Noel Gallagher, Cher, David Bowie

NEW ALBUMS 79
Dexys, Public Image Ltd, Soft Cell, Blur, The Lilac Time, Georgia, 80s Classical With Nik Kershaw, Carol Decker, Johnny Hates Jazz And The Orchestra Of Opera North, Stewart Copeland, Kelly Clarkson, Steve Lukather, John Mellencamp, The Hives, Rita Ora, Anne-Marie, Jungle, The View, Penguin Cafe, Joe McAlinden, Django Django, Steven Jones And Logan Sky, Girl Ray

REISSUES 86
Fun Boy Three, ABC, Pet Shop Boys, Wham!, David Sylvian, Talking Heads, NOW, Landscape, Paul Hardcastle, Dead Or Alive, Bad Manners, Arthur Baker, Dannii Minogue, Girls Aloud, The Sound

LIVE 94
Peter Gabriel, James

BOOKS 97
Rave New World: Confessions Of A Raving Reporter by Kirk Field; *Bowie Odyssey 73* by Simon Goddard, *Listen To My Heart: Life, Love & Roxette* by Marie Fredriksson with Helena von Zweigbergk; *This Must Be The Place* by Jesse Rifkin

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CLASSIC POP WHO'S WHO

82

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Beth Simpson
Wham! Rap *6
Ian Wade
Club Tropicana *7
Wyndham Wallace
Careless Whisper *8
Annie Zaleski
Everything She Wants

SOUNDBITES

*1 "A Motown-esque pop-soul stomper where George Michael really comes into his own as a mature songwriter of the highest calibre."
*2 "The sound of middle class adolescent rebellion chimed with the 15-year-old me in Devon."
*3 "The perfect expression of Wham!'s escapist friendship and possibly the first Balearic classic. For a deepcut, I agree with Shirlie that *If You Were There* hinted where a third album could have gone."
*4 "The catchiest ever ode to being on the dole."
*5 "Funny, wise and just on the right side of juvenile."
*6 "Genuinely subversive. Never before (or since) has the work/time discipline demanded by modern capitalism been attacked with such glee."
*7 "Because songs that start with people walking on gravel indicate EXCITEMENT. See also *Love Is The Drug*."
*8 "'Guilty feet have got no rhythm' may be as good as lyrics ever get."

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

The winner of the Best Writer, Specialist category, in 2022's British Society of Magazine Editors Awards, our latest issue sees **John Earls** meet Andrew Ridgeley and Pepsi & Shirlie for a world exclusive Wham! cover feature. John also chats to guitarist Andy Taylor, and oversees our new albums and reissues reviews sections.

Paul Kirkley makes his living from interviewing famous people with much more interesting and glamorous lives than his own. He is also, to the best of his knowledge, the only paid TV critic for a national supermarket chain. This issue, he's granted the first listen to Rick Astley's forthcoming studio album, provisionally titled *Are We There Yet?*

Steve O'Brien has written for such publications as *The Guardian, Radio Times, Esquire, The New Statesman* and *Empire*. For *Classic Pop*, he catches up with ace tunesmith (and Duran Duran co-founder) Stephen Duffy to hear all about The Lilac Time's *Dance Till All The Stars Come Down*, which scoops this issue's coveted Best New Album award.

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POP UP

Tears For Fears and Kylie top stellar Radio 2 festival bill

Radio 2 has announced details of its biggest ever live music event outside London, with an impressive lineup of major pop talent.

Held on 16-17 September, Tears For Fears will headline day one at Victoria Park, Leicester, for this year's Radio 2 In The Park festival. Also among the featured artists on the first day are Bananarama, Soft Cell, Deacon Blue and Texas.

Topping the bill on the second day will be a headline appearance by Kylie Minogue. Other notable names include The Pretenders, Rick Astley, Sam Ryder and Simply Red.

Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith of Tears For Fears said: "We love playing live and can't wait to bring some of our favourite songs, old and new, to thousands of Radio 2 listeners."

As the news was announced on Zoe Ball's breakfast show, Kylie explained: "I'm gonna be just fan girling for two days and then try and get my act together to headline on Sunday."

Captain ready to sail again

It's been a while since Captain's Trevor Horn-produced album *This Is Hazelville* made it into the UK Top 30 back in 2007, with hits *Glorious* and *Broke* aired everywhere from mainstream radio to Wimbledon.

Since then they've recorded two more albums, *Distraction*, which was left unreleased when EMI folded (but can be found online) and the more electronic *For Irini*, released via Pledge in 2017. Now the band return with their fourth studio LP, *Blur Rose*. Fans can tune in to their new single *High Beams* on Kickstarter now and pledge allegiance for a copy of the collection on CD, vinyl or download – there's some other goodies on offer, too, including an art print and three-track acoustic EP. For details, visit: kickstarter.com/projects/captaintheband

STARS PAY TRIBUTE TO "ICONIC TRAILBLAZER" TINA TURNER

Stars including Beyoncé, Mariah Carey and Mick Jagger rushed to pay their respects to Tina Turner after the singer passed away on 24 May at the age of 83.

On Instagram, Mariah Carey said: "The words legendary, iconic, diva and superstar are often overused and yet Tina Turner embodies them all and so many more – an incredible performer, musician and trailblazer. To me, she will always be a survivor and an inspiration to women everywhere. Her music will continue to inspire generations to come. Rest in peace, Queen."

While performing at the Stade de France in Paris as part of her Renaissance Tour, Beyoncé halted proceedings to salute the star: "If you're a fan of mine, you're a fan of Tina Turner," the singer announced. "I wouldn't be on this stage without Tina Turner. I want you guys to scream so she can feel your love. I feel so blessed that I was alive to witness her brilliance."

One of the most important and influential music stars of the 20th century, Turner sold more than 100 million records across an extraordinary career. A performer since the 60s, she achieved superstardom in her forties, with a string of era-defining singles, including *Private Dancer*, *What's Love Got To Do With It* and *We Don't Need Another Hero*.

Her fifth solo LP, 1984's *Private Dancer*, was such a success – it won the Grammy Award for Record of the Year – it was considered, as *Billboard* wrote, "one of the greatest comebacks in music history."

Her initial breakthrough, though, did not come as a solo artist. The woman born Anna Mae Bullock began her career with Ike Turner's Kings Of Rhythm band in 1957, appearing on her first record, *Boxtop*, in 1958 (credited as 'Little Ann'). Later, after beginning a relationship with Ike (and after being renamed Tina, as it rhymed with Sheena, Queen of the

Jungle), they became the singing duo Ike & Tina Turner, releasing such hits as *River Deep, Mountain High, It's Gonna Work Out Fine, Proud Mary* and *Nutbush City Limits.* They disbanded in 1976, when the pair split.

Tina's first years as a solo artist found her struggling, but the singer's fortunes changed in 1983, when David Bowie told Capitol Records that she was his favourite vocalist. A version of Al Green's *Let's Stay Together*, produced by Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh from Heaven 17, followed, peaking at No.6 in the UK, before entering the US Top 30 the following year.

Turner's *Private Dancer* album was a phenomenon, staying in the US Top 10 for nine months. It even led to Hollywood knocking on her door. In 1985 she appeared in a leading role opposite Mel Gibson in *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*, a movie in which she also contributed to the soundtrack *(We Don't Need Another Hero* – UK No.3 and US No.2).

In 1986 she released her sixth album, *Break Every Rule*, which went Top 5 in the UK and US and spawned the singles *Typical Male* and *Two People*.

In 1993, a Hollywood biopic was made – *What's Love Got To Do With It* starring Angela Bassett as Tina and Laurence Fishburne as Ike Turner. The movie further established Tina as one of the world's biggest names in music. Her final album was 1999's *Twenty Four Seven*, though she continued to perform into the 21st century.

The singer had suffered a number of health issues in recent years including cancer, a stroke and kidney failure. Her death on 24 May inspired tributes from across the cultural spectrum. Mick Jagger who'd known Turner since she supported The Rolling Stones in the late 60s and who also sang with Tina at Live Aid in 1985 said: "She was truly an enormously talented performer and singer. Inspiring, warm, funny and generous. She helped me so much when I was young and I will never forget her."

Debbie Harry posted on Twitter: "I was a benefactor of the energy, creativity and talents of Tina Turner. A woman who started in rural Nutbush, [Tennessee] cotton fields and worked her way to the very top. Tina was a great inspiration to me when I was starting out and remains so to this day. Love you Tina. RIP."

Elton John added on Instagram: "We have lost one of the world's most exciting and electric performers. A total legend on record and on stage. She was untouchable."

Former US President Barack Obama joined the online tributes to say: "Tina Turner was raw. She was powerful. She was unstoppable. And she was unapologetically herself – speaking and singing her truth through joy and pain; triumph and tragedy. Today we join fans around the world in honouring the Queen of Rock and Roll, and a star whose light will never fade."

© Paul Cox

LIVE LP DOCUMENTS LIAM'S KNEBWORTH SOLO TRIUMPH

Liam Gallagher is celebrating the two massive solo performances that saw him return to the fabled grounds of Knebworth House with a new live album.

Oasis played two era-defining gigs at the stately home back in August 1996 and Liam's return on 3-4 June 2022 was feverishly anticipated with its 170,000 tickets selling out almost instantly. In a nod to the initial Oasis gig dates, *Knebworth 22* will be released on 11 August and features 16 songs from across the weekend including a guest appearance from John Squire on *Champagne Supernova*.

Knebworth 22 is now available to pre-order. In addition to the album's digital release, physical formats include standard and deluxe CDs, black double-vinyl and sun yellow double-vinyl. A striking olive and black marble double-vinyl edition is also available exclusively from Liam's official store.

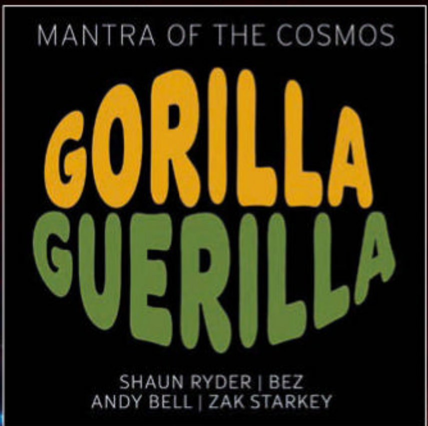
SHAUN AND BEZ GO APE FOR NEW SUPERGROUP

Members of Happy Mondays and former Oasis bandmates have joined forces to cook up a new psychedelic supergroup.

Mantra Of The Cosmos comprise Shaun Ryder and Bez from the Mondays alongside ex-Oasis members Zak Starkey and Andy Bell, the latter also an ex-member of Ride.

The brainchild of former Who sticksman Starkey who enlisted the help of Creation Records founder Alan McGee, the band have launched the project with lead single *Gorilla Guerilla*. Zak describes the tune as: "A fantastic psychedelic groove from a band of misfits, outsiders and innovators."

Making their live debut at London's The Box, the band followed it by headlining Glastonbury's Glade Stage on 25 June.



PAUL HARDCASTLE

THE N-N-N-N-NINETEEN MAN ON *THAT* HIT AND HIS UNLIKELY TIME AS AN 80s POP STAR

BETH SIMPSON

He's the reason virtually everyone over 45 in the UK can tell you the average age of the combat soldier in Vietnam. And he's (sort of) responsible for the Spice Girls. *19* changed Paul Hardcastle's life. He tells *Classic Pop* of his years as a major label artist, how this jazz-funk producer bagged a Sir Laurence Olivier cameo, ended up in Washington researching the Cold War and how he dashed off a new *TOTP* theme in three days.

Do you ever wonder how life might have turned out had you not come across that *Vietnam Requiem* documentary?
I think I'd still be doing music. Before *19* I was selling a lot of records. I'd put out *Rain Forest*, which knocked Madonna off the 12" charts. In fact, that's how I met Simon Fuller. He was looking after the writers of *Like A Virgin* and was doing publishing at the time. He said, 'Do you fancy coming in for a chat?' So he arranged a meeting with the rest of Chrysalis and I brought in the demo of *19*. Most people laughed at it but after the meeting it was just me and Simon and he said, 'Look I don't think they get it. How about if I leave this job to become your manager?' Three months later we were No.1 in 13 different countries and it started off 19 Management.

At what point did you realise you had a huge hit record on your hands?
Not until it went in at No.4. We were originally going to release it in February, and then someone pointed out that the 10th anniversary of the end of the war was in May. It's because of that that I was interviewed on national news and my life changed overnight.

So Chrysalis wanted a follow-up. Why the Great Train Robbery as a theme for *Just For Money*?
I'd released this ground-breaking track. But do I follow it up with something like *Don't Waste My Time*? Or do I come up with something similar? The whole world was telling me what to do. In the end I thought, 'Let's think of something I'm interested in', which was the Great Train Robbery. Do I listen to it now? No, but it works fantastic with the video.

How did you get Sir Laurence Olivier on board? He can't have come cheap.
Yes, he was expensive. He'd heard about me 'cause his daughter had played *19* to him. Simon sorted it. I'd said to him, 'I need someone with great presence to open it up'. And he said, 'How about Laurence Olivier?' I didn't know much about him to be honest.

How did you get the gig writing the *Top Of The Pops* theme?
After *Just Like Money*, we did *Don't Waste My Time* which was a hit. I was just coming off stage at *Top Of The Pops* and a guy came up to me. I didn't know who he was, I thought he was a cameraman, and he said 'I really did like *19* and I like that track as well'. He said his name was Michael and asked if I could come up with a new theme for *Top Of The Pops*? I was thinking, 'Hang on a minute... shit, this is [*TOTP* producer] Michael Hurll!' So I said 'I would love to. How long have I got?' And he said, 'Er... a couple of weeks?' I recorded that song (*The Wizard*) and gave it to him within three days.

What possessed you to write a concept album about the Cold War with 1988's *No Winners*?
I got a message from a guy at Imperial College who was doing a project about trying to stop nuclear proliferation that he'd like to talk to me. His name was Jeremy Leggett and he said, 'Do you think you can help in any way?' So I agreed. I thought I'd have to know about how this all works, because if I start opening my mouth about it I'm going to look a complete prat. Simon Fuller arranged for me to spend some time in Washington and speak to people who really knew their shit. Did it work as a record? No, but I think it raised awareness. I sometimes joke that three months later you had Gorbachev and Reagan signing the treaty – that must have been my album!

What have you been up to musically in the decades since then?
I went back to doing *Rain Forest*-type tracks, the chilled out stuff. I was No.1 on the Tokyo Hot 100 twice. Then my stuff started blowing up in America – I've had something like 12 No.1s on the Adult Contemporary/Jazz chart.

How do you look back on your time as a pop star, doing music videos, *Smash Hits* interviews and all the rest of it?
I enjoyed it for three years then the novelty wore off. After a while, a new A&R guy came in at Chrysalis and he didn't really see what I was doing so we parted company. I went on to sell 10 times more albums than I'd done on Chrysalis! I have no regrets.

● ***Nineteen And Beyond: 1984-1988*, a new 4CD boxset is released on 28 July via Chrysalis and reviewed on page 91**

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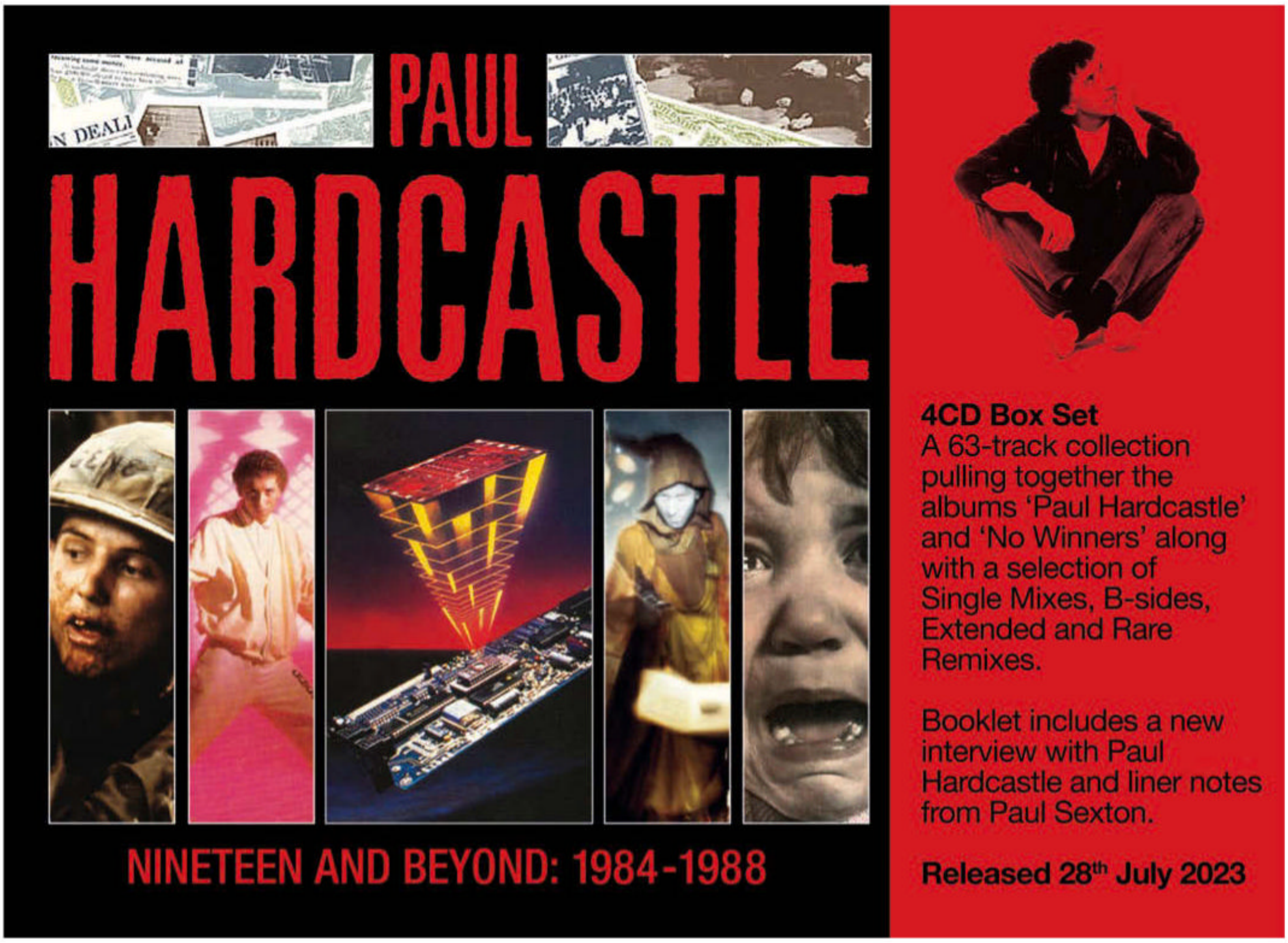


KILIMANJARO PRESENTS

1 HIT WONDER

I WANT TO BE YOUR PROPERTY
BLUE MERCEDES

When London duo Blue Mercedes drove on to pop's forecourt in 1987 it was a brief visit, but they left behind a superb, infectious single.

With singer David Titlow admirably carrying off the narrative expressions of ABC's Martin Fry over a melody by partner Duncan Millar, the track caught on quickly via a production overseen by PWL, even though they were not part of the dominant Hit Factory, and a video featuring a cameo from Hollywood musicals legend Cyd Charisse, namechecked in the chorus.

It was hard to know who the duo were aiming at with a lyric above the sixth-form pop of their contemporaries (letters to pop publications saw readers asking who Charisse was), but initially it didn't matter, as the colourful catchiness of the track was aimed squarely at radio.

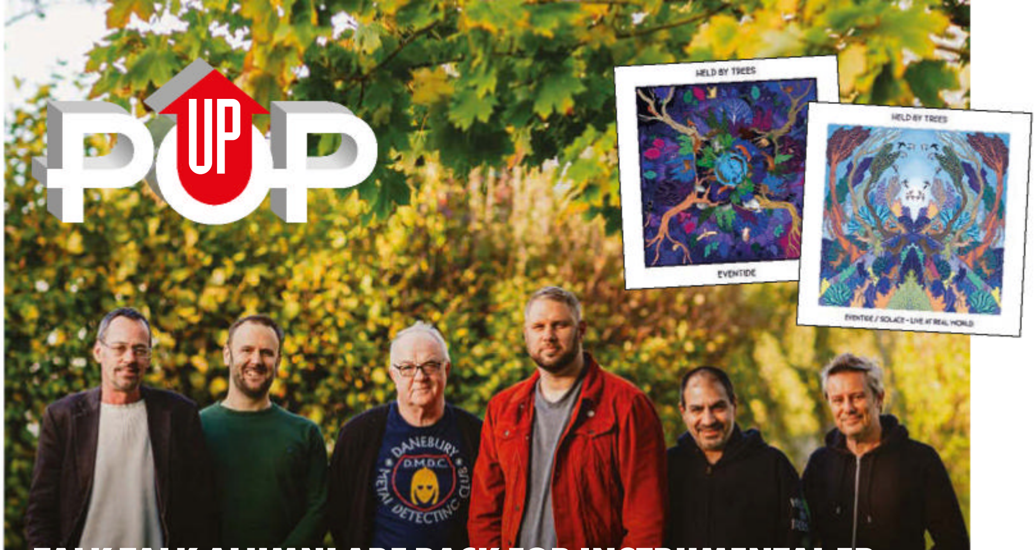
Perseverance was key, as the song fell down the chart twice in its early days, before entering the UK Top 40 seven weeks after release and peaking at No.23.

It appeared on the dance chart in the US, too, after MTV picked up on the video due to the presence of Charisse, by now in her 60s.

Follow-up singles stalled at No.57 and No.46 and the album, titled *Rich And Famous*, failed to chart. After a rethink, Blue Mercedes had a spell making indie dance music under different names before Titlow turned to photography and Millar became a producer.

Matthew Rudd is the host of Forgotten 80s on Absolute 80s

POP UP



TALK TALK ALUMNI ARE BACK FOR INSTRUMENTAL EPs

Instrumental project Held By Trees are following up their *Classic Pop*-approved debut album *Solace* with a pair of EPs recorded at Peter Gabriel's studios in Bath.

Released via Sound Canyon Records on 11 August, *Eventide/Solace – Live At Real World* finds the six-piece live iteration of Held By Trees bringing together three of the Talk Talk/Mark Hollis alumni that contributed to their debut album including guitarist Robbie McIntosh. Led by Held By Trees mainstay David Joseph, the band were recorded playing in the Big Room at Real World in November 2022, a week after their debut live performances.

Entitled *Eventide*, the second EP is an entirely new suite of music themed on the transition from daylight to darkness that was tracked live at Real World before overdubs were added by instrumentalists in the United States and Canada by old friends of project leader Joseph.

The twin EPs will be released on separate CDs and as two sides of one vinyl pressing by new American record label Sound Canyon and their retail arm innersleeve.com

TIME TRAVELLING PRIMALS HAVE RAIDED THE ARCHIVE

Primal Scream are raiding the archives for their "debut album that never was" via a collection of the band's first two singles on Creation Records and 11 previously unreleased BBC session tracks.

New 16-track compilation *Reverberations (Travelling In Time)*, which is set for release on 28 July, features the Primals' debut single *It Happens* backed with *All Fall Down*. The tracks were hastily recorded at London's Alaska Studios in February 1985 on Creation and released that May before catching the attention of Radio 1's John Peel who invited the band for their first session on his radio show. Also included in the compilation is second single *Crystal Crescent* plus its B-side *Velocity Girl*.

Out on Primal Scream's Young Tiki label, *Reverberations...* is the first in a series of limited edition records that will explore rare and unreleased archive material.

The band's *Sonic Flower Groove* album, including unreleased recordings and remixed masters, is due out in 2024.

Reverberations (Travelling In Time) will be available on limited edition black or clear vinyl, as well as a special gatefold CD edition.

Physical formats of the LP include a wealth of unseen period photography plus essays by founder members Bobby Gillespie and Jim Beattie plus Saint Etienne's Bob Stanley.

Speaking of the new project, singer Gillespie said: "This music proves that we really had something special going on back then. I'm very proud of this album and glad these sessions are finally being released."

As Stanley describes in this LP's sleevenotes: "Primal Scream looked like a gang. More precisely, they looked like a Glaswegian variant of Love, a bunch of hard-nuts playing soft sounds laced with something potentially explosive."

Mark Millar

MY POP LIFE

THE COMIC BOOK WRITER – AND CREATOR OF *KICK-ASS* AND *KINGSMAN* – REFLECTS ON HIS MUSIC OBSESSIONS…

STEVE O'BRIEN

Who were your musical heroes growing up?
Undoubtedly Queen. I'm the youngest of six and there's 14 years between me and my nearest brother so at the peak of the UK mid-80s alternative scene I was listening to 1972 albums that people's dads were into. The press at the time were absolutely *brutal* about Queen so I felt hugely vindicated when they ruled Live Aid and everyone else's guitars went limp. This was my *Pretty Woman* in the department store moment when I swaggered into school on the Monday.

What's the first song that you remember loving?
Simon & Garfunkel's *El Cóndor Pasa*. It's traditional in Scotland to have a song as your party piece at family events, and when I was three this was the one I'd have to stand on a chair and sing. A three-year-old singing every lyric of Simon & Garfunkel songs must have looked like I was possessed.

Who were your favourite artists as a teenager?
Queen, ELO and The Bee Gees were my favourites when all my pals were into The Smiths, The Pixies and The Stranglers etc. I'm amazed I wasn't bullied for loving these, but I think other kids just seemed baffled and possibly thought I had learning difficulties. At the same time I was dressing up as Sherlock Holmes and reading a lot of Agatha Christie.

What's the song that'll always get you dancing?
I'm a 53-year-old Scottish guy. That means I only dance ironically and at weddings.

What was your first single?
Flash Gordon by Queen. Kids walk out of movies and will buy absolutely anything with their favourite character from slippers to Shreddies. The fact that this

© Getty

movie was *so good* and had a Queen soundtrack was like a speedball for me. I almost couldn't process the pure joy of it all and literally stepped out of the cinema, aged 10, and bought the single for 99p on the way home. I bought the album later and my friends and I would stick it on and beat the shit out of each other, acting out every scene. I still hang out with these guys so we should do this again after the pub sometime.

Your favourite pop album?
My wife has the greatest answer when someone from the music industry asks this question, as the typical response is: 'The White Album' or whatever. But she always says *Now That's What I Call Music 24*. They always ask why and she explains that it's 55 No.1s for the price of a normal eight-track album. I love this answer so much I'm going to steal it, though my *NTWICM* album would be number four. *The Reflex*? *Ghostbusters*? *Radio Gaga*? *Together In Electric Dreams*? Come on! I loaned this to my cousin in 1988 and he still hasn't given me it back.

And what's your favourite 80s single?
I've given this a lot of thought and I almost can't come up with an

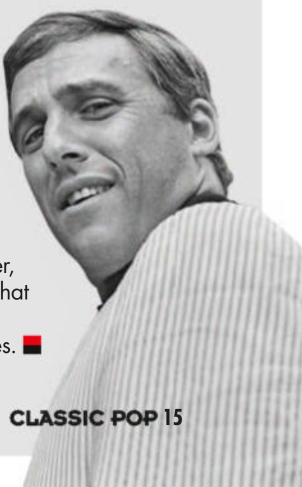
answer. In the 80s I was listening to 70s tracks, but I realise now I picked up a huge love for this era from school discos and nightclubs I was sneaking into underage. So now almost every song has a happy memory that makes me warm to the music in

a way I didn't at the time. I like upbeat stuff. Maybe *Eye Of The Tiger* by Survivor. But I'm also a big movie soundtrack guy. I loved *A View To A Kill* by Duran Duran.

What's the best gig you've ever been to?
No question – Burt Bacharach when he did Glasgow. I'm a *huge* fan of Burt and Hal David, but it was quite surreal as I was 50 years younger than anyone else. Someone genuinely died a few rows behind us and everyone acted like this was a completely normal thing to happen on a Tuesday evening.

What's your favourite needle drop moment in a movie?
Hip To Be Square by Huey Lewis in *American Psycho*. I really enjoy that blue collar Americana kind of music and *loved* this when it was featured in the movie. Like *Singing In The Rain* in *A Clockwork Orange*, it messes so brilliantly with our emotions. Another favourite, if I can pimp one of our own movies, was *The Banana Splits* used for Hit-Girl's entrance in *Kick-Ass*. We used that as a temp track and never thought we'd get away with it in the actual movie.

What pop song – if any – will you have played at your funeral?
Oh, I'm a Catholic so it'll be all hymns for me. Also, as a movie producer, I like the idea that this means no copyright issues.



LOST & FOUND

THE DRUM IS EVERYTHING
CARMEL

Carmel McCourt's magnificent bluesy voice dominates a fine, varied jazz-inflected pop album that draws on many a musical influence. Somehow both big and stripped back, it's as if each musician has popped in with a new instrument, recorded a turn, and walked off again.

Hit singles bookend the album. *More, More, More* is an ecstatic opener, with bouncy double bass, attention-seeking trumpets and sympathetic percussion, fading just as you think it could carry on until the end of time. The chanting hook and tinkling piano of *Bad Day* closes the album, with McCourt improvising the chorus while making every word count on the verses.

For each epic there's a jam; *I Thought I Was Going Mad* befits its title as both percussion and vocals pack in as much as they can in two minutes, while the title track throws in refrains of Shirley Ellis' *The Clapping Song* as the quoted drum bangs and crashes in all directions.

McCourt accompanying just a hi-hat and bass for a stunning version of *Stormy Weather* is a real highlight, but there are iffy moments – her vocals on *The Prayer* are spoiled by lots of unnecessary self-expression around her, and the cover of *Tracks Of My Tears* falls short.

The Drum Is Everything made the UK Top 20 in 1984. Carmel, who were initially a trio, became a duo in 2000, issuing their ninth studio album in 2022.

Matthew Rudd

POP UP

PEPSI & SHIRLIE SCRAP POP RETURN

Bad news for Pepsi & Shirlie fans: the duo have currently abandoned plans for their pop comeback. Back in 2021, they told *Classic Pop* that they were working on their first new music since 1991's *Change* album, writing with Shirlie's singer-songwriter daughter, Harleymoon Kemp.

But Shirlie explained to us that, with Pepsi now living in St Lucia, writing new material together over Zoom became too complicated. She explained: "We wrote a couple of songs with Harley, but it was so much harder. We gave up a bit quick."

Pepsi added: "We need to be in the same room, with the same energy. All the ideas were there, but the writing was disjointed. I just don't think we're cut out for this newbie technology."

In happier news, Pepsi's debut novel, *The Promise*, will be published by HarperFiction next spring. Pepsi explained: "It's based loosely on my parents leaving the Caribbean to come to England and is a story of the West Indian community emerging in the UK. It's a very colourful novel, with lots of fun stories."

● **Read our exclusive cover feature interview with Andrew Ridgeley plus Pepsi & Shirlie on pages 22-29**

DANCE FESTIVAL BRINGS THE BIG HITTERS TO ST HELENS

Reminisce Festival is set to return to St Helens in September with its biggest lineup to date.

More than 120 global DJs and artists will head to the town's Sherdley Park on 9 September for a major festival that includes some of the biggest names in old skool dance music and 90s pop.

Among the lineup is M People frontwoman Heather Small, Boyzlife, Vengaboys, Phats & Small, Bassheads and K-Klass alongside Shades Of Rhythm, Bassheads and Oceanic. Headlining the event will be Swedish House Mafia's Grammy-winning John Martin.

Across six stages on the festival site, the event also plays host to an array of DJ sets including Dave Pearce, Tall Paul, Lisa Pin-Up, Jeremy Healy, Jon Pleased Wimmin, Slipmatt and many more.

For further information on the festival or to purchase tickets, visit: www.reminiscefestival.com

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IAN PEEL'S A TO Z of POP

D IS FOR... DOUBLE-DIGIT DYNAMITE

FROM PSYCHEDELIA TO ACID HOUSE AND FROM PUNK TO "POP'S FINAL PARTY", 1966, '77, '88 AND '99 PROVED THAT, WHEN WE HIT A DOUBLE DIGIT YEAR, THE RESULTS ARE OFTEN DYNAMITE

I once read, I can't remember where, about the coincidence that both 1966 and 1977 were pivotal years for pop. And I've since realised that not only is this true but 1988 and 1999 also support the argument that the double-digit years were the ones that were the most revolutionary in the second half of the last century.

1966 is an easy one. The year that pop music came of age against the backdrop of the psychedelic revolution. The Beatles released *Revolver* and then went straight into Abbey Road to create *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The Beach Boys also released their seminal album *Pet Sounds* and hit No.1 with *Good Vibrations*.

Although 1966 had more than its fair share of timeless singles – The Supremes' *You Can't Hurry Love* and *Sunny Afternoon* by The Kinks among them – it was *Revolver* and *Pet Sounds* that nail the hypothesis that this double-digit year turned pop on its axis.

The same can be said for 1977 – twice over in fact, with disco and punk. Disco was already alive and kicking in 1977: Van McCoy's *The Hustle* and Labelle's *Lady Marmalade* were a few years old by then. But it was the year that the genre went stratospheric, first with Cerrone's *Supernature* and Donna Summer's *I Feel Love* and then, when *Saturday Night Fever* opened in cinemas, the underground genre went overground and music would never be the same again.

As for punk, 1977 was 'year zero'. Pedantically speaking, punk began in the last few months of the year before with the release of The Damned's *New Rose*. But, when I once worked with The Undertones, their bassist Michael Bradley was asked by a blog to choose his Top 10 punk singles of all time. Six of them – including Sex Pistols' *God Save The Queen* and Ramones' *Sheena Is A Punk Rocker* – were all from 1977. Further evidence, if you need it, can be found on the aptly-titled and intense 87-track compilation, *1977: The Year Punk Broke* on Cherry Red.

FOR 1988, THE DYNAMITE MOMENT WAS ACID HOUSE. WHILE YOU COULD RECALL THE YEAR FOR ITS ACOUSTIC REVIVAL, IT'S BETTER TO REMEMBER IT FOR THE HOLY TRINITY OF ACID/HOUSE-POP NO.1 HITS.

As for 1988, the dynamite moment was acid house. While you could recall the year for its acoustic revival (thanks to the likes of Tanita Tikaram, Tracy Chapman and Fairground Attraction), it's better to remember it for the holy trinity of acid/house-pop No.1 hits: S-Express' *Theme From...*, Yazz And The Plastic Population's *The Only Way Is Up* and *Beat Dis* by Bomb The Bass.

Did 1999 have a similar double-digit impact? The end of the century didn't invent any new mainstream genres but, decades later, its influence is still felt. I recently worked on an album project with Leilani who was at the peak of her powers in 1999 and realised that this was a special moment, before pop went awry with the smartphone-, X-Factor- and iTunes-obsessed noughties. Where the future looked to be held in the hands of (often singularly-monikered) musicians such as Emmie, Jamelia, Emilia, Billie and Leilani herself.

1999 rounds off the double-digit flashpoints of the last century of pop music with an era that author Michael Cragg explores in *Reach For The Stars: 1996-2006 – Fame, Fallout and Pop's Final Party* as "a double-denim-loving time… before the glare of social media and the accession of streaming."

It's the year that Bob Stanley calls "pre-millennium bubblegum," referring to it in the same way I think of '66 psychedelia, '77 disco and '88 acid house as "an extraordinarily fertile period for British pop."

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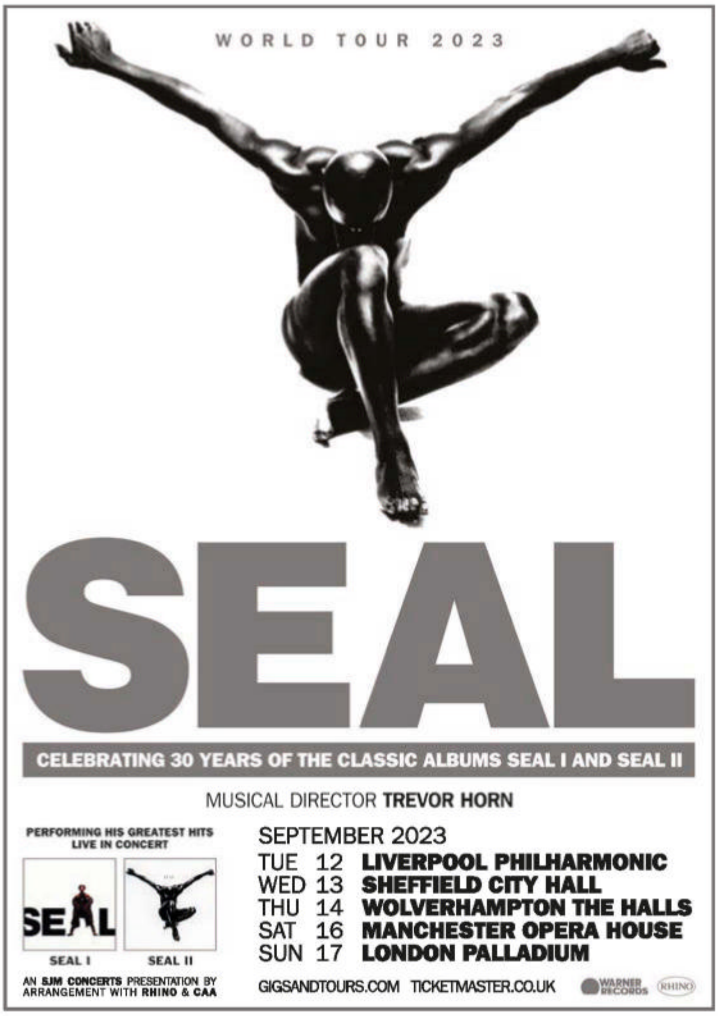
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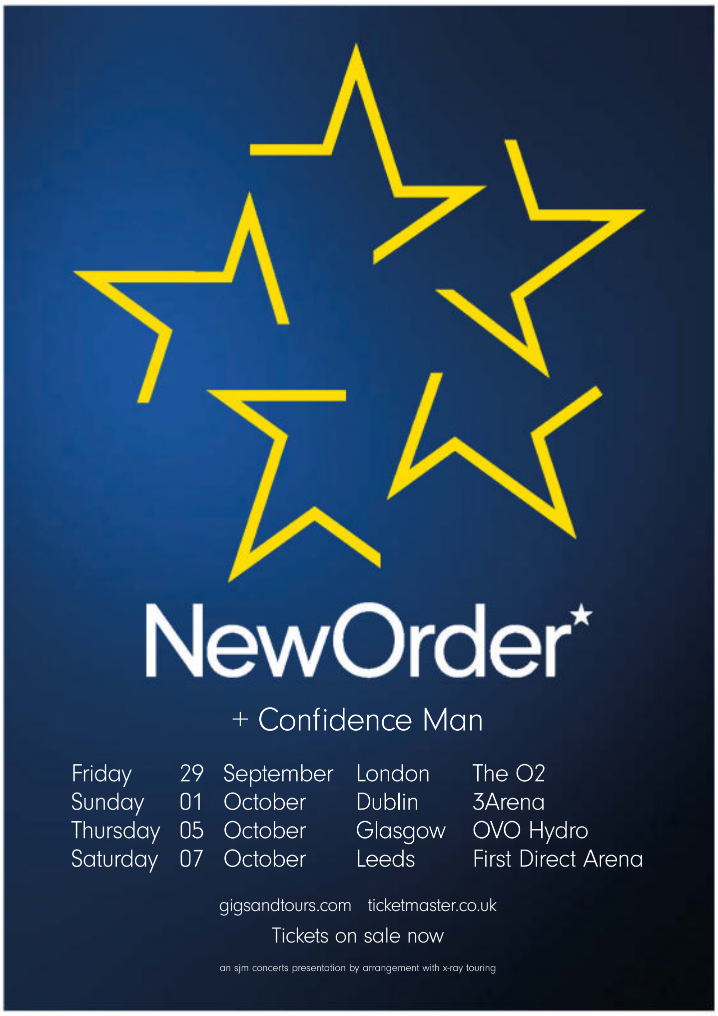
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THIS MONTH IN

POP

JULY 1988

THIS MONTH, JACKO PLAYS TO A SELL-OUT WEMBLEY STADIUM, THE UK SAYS HELLO TO TRACY CHAPMAN AND FISH WAVES GOODBYE TO MARILLION

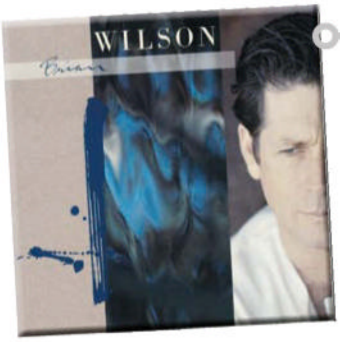
STEVE O'BRIEN

6 Bob Dylan performs at the Frederick Mann Music Center, Philadelphia, supported by The Alarm.

9 Cheap Trick hit the summit of the Billboard chart with *The Flame*, the group's only US No.1 LP.

9 Tracy Chapman begins a three-week run at No.1 on the UK Albums Chart with her eponymous debut LP.

9 Glenn Medeiros goes to No.1 on the UK hit parade with the George Benson cover, *Nothing's Gonna Change My Love For You*.



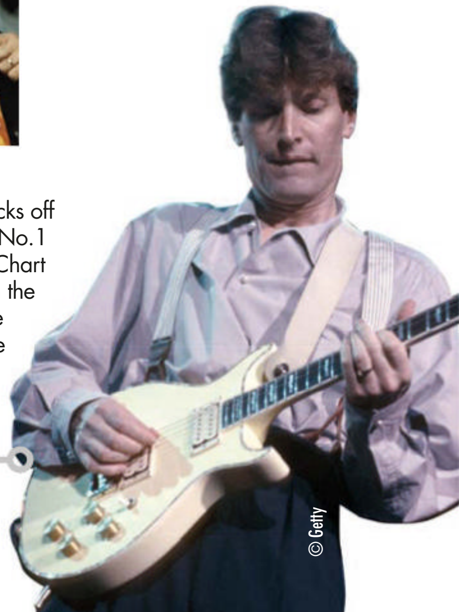
12 Former Beach Boy Brian Wilson releases his self-titled debut solo record. Among the album's contributors are Nick Laird-Clowes, Jeff Lynne, Christopher Cross and Terence Trent D'Arby.

15 MTV in the US refuses to air the video for Neil Young's latest release, *This Note's For You*. In the clip, the hair of a Michael Jackson lookalike catches fire, which is then extinguished by 'Whitney Houston' pouring a can of Coke on the singer's head.

18 Ike Turner is sentenced in Santa Monica to one year in jail for possessing and transporting cocaine. Police had stopped the one-time husband of Tina Turner in August 1987 for driving erratically and discovered six grams of cocaine in his car.

23 Fish plays his last live date with Marillion at Craigtoun Country Park, St. Andrews in Scotland.

18 Former Velvet Underground collaborator Nico dies after suffering a heart attack while riding a bicycle on holiday with her son in Ibiza.



30 Steve Winwood kicks off a four-week run at No.1 on the US Singles Chart with *Roll With It*, a No.53 hit in the UK. Holland-Dozier-Holland are later credited with co-writing the song due to its resemblance to the Junior Walker track *(I'm A) Roadrunner*.

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2

Michael Jackson becomes the first artist to have five No.1 singles from one album when *Dirty Diana* hits the top of the US charts. The song was the fifth single to be spun from Jacko's seventh long-player, *Bad*, following *I Just Can't Stop Loving You*, *Bad*, *The Way You Make Me Feel* and *Man In The Mirror*.

Just 10 days later, the singer would arrive in the UK for his debut solo live appearances in the country. Among the eight performances was a gig at Wembley on 16 July where he played to a sold-out crowd of 72,000, which included the Prince and Princess of Wales. The concert was recorded and released in 2012 as *Live At Wembley July 16, 1988*. According to an official statement from the Jackson Estate, the video was sourced from the singer's personal VHS copy of the show, the only known one in existence.

A further four singles would be released from *Bad – Another Part Of Me* (UK No.15), *Smooth Criminal* (UK No.8), *Leave Me Alone* (UK No.2) and *Liberian Girl* (UK No.13). *Bad* was Jackson's third and final hit-making collaboration with producer Quincy Jones. While it couldn't escape the shadow of its 70 million-selling predecessor *Thriller*, *Bad* still managed to shift 35 million copies.

TOP 5 UK ALBUMS CHART
10 JULY 1988

1 **TRACY CHAPMAN**
TRACY CHAPMAN

2 **KYLIE MINOGUE**
KYLIE

3 **BILLY IDOL**
IDOL SONGS: 11 OF THE BEST

4 **BROS**
PUSH

5 **BARRY WHITE**
THE COLLECTION

Dynamic duo: Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael at the photoshoot for what became the front cover for 1984's *Make It Big* album

© Tony McGee

"WHAM! WAS OUR FRIENDSHIP SET TO MUSIC"

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE GEORGE MICHAEL AND ANDREW RIDGELEY PROFESSIONALLY PARTED COMPANY IN 1986, A MAJOR WHAM! REISSUE IS HAPPENING, WITH A SINGLES COMPILATION AND 7" BOXSET. IT COINCIDES WITH THE FIRST OFFICIAL WHAM! DOCUMENTARY, MADE BY NETFLIX. AS THEIR INCREDIBLE STORY IS FINALLY TOLD, ANDREW GIVES A VERY RARE INTERVIEW, WHILE PEPSI & SHIRLIE ALSO TELL THEIR PART IN WHAM!'S ALL TOO BRIEF HEYDAY.

JOHN EARLS

Forget about Bonfire Night: 5 November 1979 was an explosive day in music history and for the career prospects of 16-year-old Andrew Ridgeley. That was the date he left Bushey Meads secondary school and the day he and George Michael – or 'Yog' as Andrew still affectionately calls him, from the phonetic 'Yoghir' pronunciation of Georgios – decided it was finally time to form a band together.

Pop historians already know Ridgeley was the initial driving force behind Wham!, the confident teenager who persuaded his shy, awkward best mate to be in a band. It's a genesis story that Andrew recalls clearly, reminiscing: "We were 14 when I first brought up the idea of forming a band. Yog said he needed to get his O-Levels out of the way first. November 5th was a Monday, a few weeks into our A-Levels. At breaktime, I told our form tutor: 'Look, I'm leaving school'. She said: 'That's just as well, as we were going to ask you to leave'. I was pleased – I'd got in first! I phoned a nearby college, Cassio, and got an interview to go there instead. It made me realise it was now or never to form a band. When I'd raised the idea with Yog after O-Levels, he said: 'Well, er... It'll have to be after my A-Levels.' I thought he was going to keep making excuses. I phoned George and said: 'Look, we're forming a band *today*. We're doing it today, otherwise it's never going to happen.' There was a pause and Yog said: 'OK, yeah. Let's do it.'"

Andrew would have been expelled from Bushey Meads for truancy, but there's no sign of the juvenile delinquent as he greets *Classic Pop* at the King's Cross headquarters of Wham!'s record label, Sony.

It's a minor miracle Ridgeley is being interviewed: he retired the second that Wham! finished in 1986 and, barring his solo album *Son Of Albert* in 1990, was barely heard from until his 2019 memoir, *Wham! George & Me*.

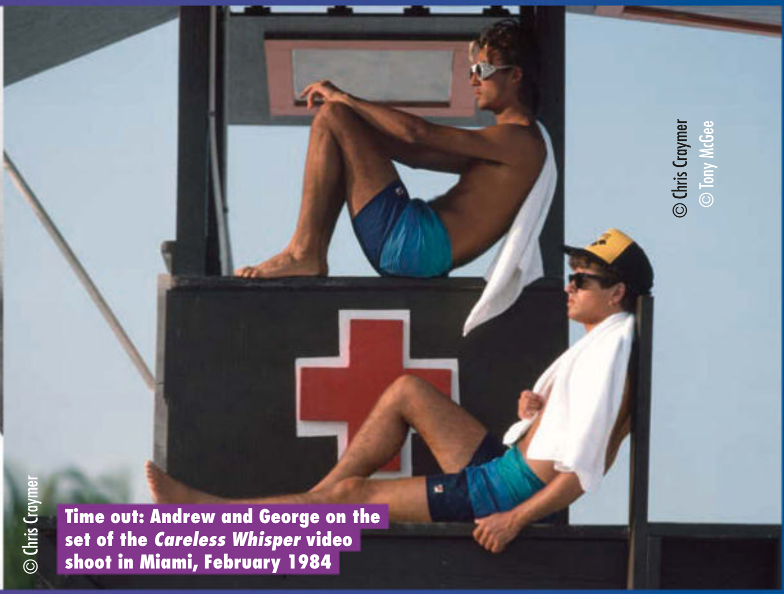
Still, for a former recluse, Andrew Ridgeley is quite the talker. A keen cyclist and surfer, he's in extraordinarily good shape: more pop stars

© Chris Craymer

George and Andrew pose in their iconic *Fantastic* black leather jackets

Fun and sunshine: Filming the *Club Tropicana* video at Pikes Hotel in Ibiza, 1983

© Getty



© Chris Craymer

Time out: Andrew and George on the set of the *Careless Whisper* video shoot in Miami, February 1984

© Chris Craymer
© Tony McGee

should sack it all off, if the quiet life means they look as trim as Ridgeley in his navy zip-up fleece. He's as relaxed as he seemed in early Wham! interviews, quick to laugh and only pausing to pick an exact word: his mum Jenny was an English teacher, after all.

The reception to that autobiography made Andrew reassess his attitude to Wham!'s legacy. "Meeting the fans at signings was a very nice experience indeed," he grins. "The palpable affection and goodwill that people hold Wham! in, right through the age groups, was remarkable for me.

"Some amazing stories were recounted to me. One lady had flown in from Kabul. Her brother had *Fantastic* on cassette in Afghanistan, where music was banned under the Taliban. In the early 80s, that cassette went around their village. It was a remarkable example of how deep and strong the effect of music can have in shaping people's lives."

"GEORGE WAS FINDING HIS WAY IN LIFE DURING WHAM!, WHEREAS ANDREW WAS FULL OF LIFE AND READY FOR SHOWTIME"
PEPSI DEMACQUE-CROCKETT

BUILDING THE LEGACY

Now personally aware of Wham!'s importance, and with the 40th anniversary of *Fantastic* looming, Ridgeley and George's estate decided it was time for both a singles compilation and a Netflix documentary so that: "We could build a legacy, which would do justice to Wham! and everything it achieved."

The resulting film, *Wham! The Biography* by Fyre Festival documentary director Chris Smith, is excellent: evocative footage, overlaid with George and Andrew the only voices heard. It's compelling in highlighting the intensity of 80s pop stardom, outdated attitudes to sexuality and just how short a time the Wham! comet was in orbit. Equally importantly, you're reminded of how downright hilarious George Michael was.

"Comedy and music were the pillars on which our friendship was based," notes Ridgeley. "We went to see the Monty Python films *The Life Of Brian* and *The Meaning Of Life* at the cinema together. The Mr Creosote scene in *The Meaning Of Life* was so funny, I really did fall off my chair laughing.

"Our shared sense of humour was extremely juvenile. We were puerile and smutty. We stayed that way. Our sense of humour didn't mature in the least.

"In Wham!, we did some shockingly juvenile things. We went through a period where, whenever we met people – especially music executives – when their hands went out to shake, we'd withdraw and..." Andrew mimes the age-old joke of putting his hand to his nose and waggling it. "So puerile! But also deeply amusing. We were just taking the rise out of the whole situation we found ourselves in, which we did a lot. We took making music seriously, but we didn't take anything else seriously."

That camaraderie was an essential part of Wham!'s appeal. Two days after meeting Ridgeley, *Classic Pop* quizzes Pepsi &

"We took making music seriously, but we didn't take anything else seriously" – Andrew Ridgeley

© Getty
© Chris Craymer

LAUGHS CHRISTMAS

Andrew Ridgeley insists his and George Michael's pranks didn't stop them being professional making videos – but admits filming *Last Christmas* was chaotic.

"It was so much fun that I don't actually appear in the video's last scene," he smiles. "Too much fun had been had by then. A friend who appears in it had to borrow his dad's trousers. They were incredibly stretchy, and he kept making a stretching sound with them. It was just so stupid that I was in tears laughing at him. I laughed so much that my face bloated and got puffy. Andy Morahan, the director, told me: 'We can't shoot you like that. You'll have to sit this scene out.'"

"How Andy ever got a film out of that shoot is a miracle," laughs Shirlie. "We had snowball fights, so the continuity was out, as everyone's hair was so wet. George took a massive snowball in his eye. And the alcohol on the last night of filming was real."

"That was a lovely moment," grins Pepsi. "A lot of schnapps. It was the only time I went skiing, too." In 2020, 36 years after Band Aid kept it from the top, *Last Christmas* reached No.1 in the UK. "Like *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, we knew *Last Christmas* was a No.1 within the first three bars," says Andrew. "It was always a slight thorn in Yog's side that it never got to No.1. It's such a brilliantly crafted pop song: a little kitsch, but with such depth and emotional resonance. Yog would have been immensely proud when *Last Christmas* finally made No.1."

Shirlie over Zoom about their thoughts on the group. "The story of Wham! is the story of George and Andrew's friendship," believes Shirlie. "I'm so pleased the documentary shows that. It shows what an integral part Andrew played, and what an inspiration he was to George."

Pepsi nods enthusiastically, continuing: "I hope people who gave Andrew such a hard time in Wham! will see the truth now. Without him, there never would have been Wham!. Andrew was a real support for George. George was finding his way in life during Wham!, whereas Andrew was full of life and ready for showtime. It's a lovely film."

As confident as Ridgeley was, there were scores of obstacles that could have prevented the duo finding their way. Their first band, The Specials-influenced The Executive, was formed with Andrew's older brother Paul on drums, plus their friends David Austin – later George's manager – and Andy Leaver on guitar. As Ridgeley points out: "Two guitarists and no bassist, with me rudimentarily on keyboards. The Executive consisted of everyone we knew who had instruments."

Their first gig was at a party at Andy's parents' house – "How his mum and dad let us do a gig, I don't know" – before a first public concert at Bushey & Oxhey Scout Hut. "We played to 16-year-olds who'd had a couple of snakebites," laughs Andrew. "I remember it as being absolutely riotous.

"The Executive had some good little tunes. Had we stuck together, it might have happened. We were starting to become less ska/reggae and more pop. You had me, Yog and Dave, who's a talented songwriter, too. I don't see why it couldn't have succeeded."

Instead, The Executive supported punk staples The Vibrators at Harrow Technical College. That worked, but then David claimed he'd booked a headline show at the venue. He hadn't. "There was a conflagration, as you can imagine," says Andrew wryly. "And that was the end of The Executive."

In the fallout, Paul and David joined other bands. Andy died of cancer aged just 21. "That was so very, very sad," sighs Ridgeley. "Andy died so quickly and so young." *Fantastic* is dedicated to Andy.

George auditioned for a band, too. "They were a soul/funk band," recalls Andrew. "I'm not sure what they were called, but two of their members went on to be in Imagination. It wasn't a genre Yog particularly liked, so we decided that we should start writing new songs ourselves instead."

Wham! Rap soon arrived, inspired by a chant of "Wham! Bam! I am the man!" that Andrew would perform while he, George and Shirlie were out clubbing. The pair moved onto *Club Tropicana* and *Careless Whisper*. Far from Ridgeley getting royalties for George's debut solo single from his mate's loyalty, the classic started from Andrew's guitar chords.

However, while *Wham! Rap* was complete, there was only "maybe half" of *Club Tropicana* and just the chorus and a verse of *Careless Whisper* ready on the demo that Wham! deluged record companies with.

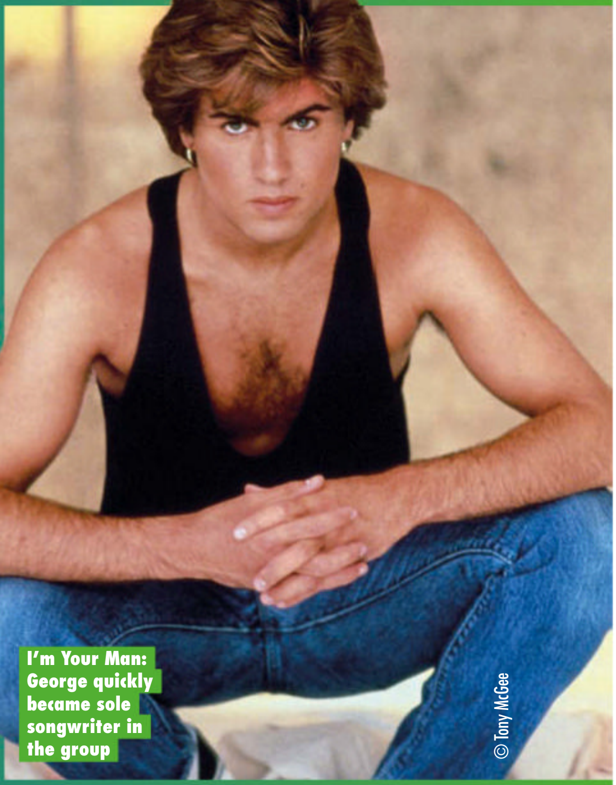
"I don't really know what possessed us to send out such an unfinished demo," acknowledges Ridgeley. "We were just so confident that those three songs were hits – and obviously we were right!"

Famously, the only person to spot Wham!'s potential was Mark Dean, a neighbour of Andrew's who'd signed Soft Cell and ABC to Universal. He was starting his own label, Innervision.

Wham!'s record deal was notoriously terrible, but Ridgeley is even-handed about Innervision's treatment. "Had we not signed Mark's deal, we wouldn't have been making records at all, I'm pretty sure of that," he shrugs. "Yog's dad got a lawyer to look over the contract first, but we were way down the list of his priorities, and none of us could believe how long he was taking.

"Mark gave us an ultimatum: sign the contract or lose the deal. I'm sure he meant it and he'd have moved onto the next act if we hadn't signed. It was the worst record deal ever signed: we didn't get paid for two years and didn't get paid on 12" singles at all. At least we were making records. But we expected to get paid for making those records, and that seemed to be a source of some confusion at Innervision."

Wham! Rap initially stalled at No.105 in the UK charts. What happened next made Andrew realise the scale of the talent of his best friend. "We needed a hit," he remembers. "We were demoing two other tracks, but they didn't have it. Then Yog pulled *Young Guns* out of the bag. It was different gravy, even when compared to *Wham! Rap*. That was the point that



I'm Your Man: George quickly became sole songwriter in the group

© Tony McGee

Enjoy what you do: Andrew Ridgeley on stage in Japan, January 1985

I realised Yog's songwriting was developing in leaps and bounds."

Excellent as it was, *Young Guns* was also struggling at UK No.42. Another artist – "Dave recently found out that it was probably Wah! Heat," reveals Ridgeley – cancelled their *Top Of The Pops* appearance at the very last minute, leaving BBC executives to relax rules that only Top 40 acts could appear. Wham! were ready... Sort of.

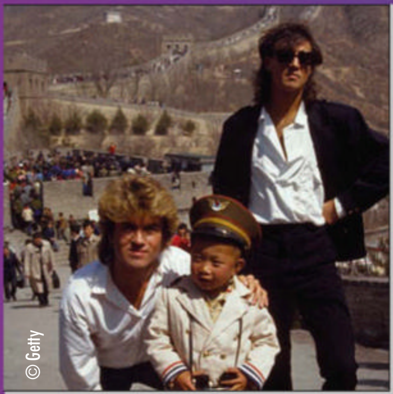
"*Top Of The Pops*' producer, Michael Hurll, oh my God!" splutters Andrew. "That show was his fiefdom, he was a proper little Napoleon. We'd been at the studio since seven in the sodding morning when we were berated for not performing ebulliently enough at one of the rehearsals. I told him: 'We've done this four times already!'

"By the time of the actual recording, I was bored and despised Michael Hurll so much that I let it get in the way of my performance. Thankfully, the girls and Yog were more than adequate compensation for my lack of brio."

Ridgeley's 40-year-old fury is a surprise to Shirlie, who laughs delightedly: "I loved it! I was more scared about how I looked than anything else, so I spent £60 on my Melissa Caplan dress, which was a fortnight's wages. You were bossed around on *Top Of The Pops*, but I wasn't disappointed at all."

Pepsi, who was still trying to become a session singer while future Style Council vocalist Dee C Lee was Shirlie's then-Wham! partner, tells her friend: "I remember that dress, it was lovely! I saw that Wham! performance and thought: 'A white girl with a black girl? Interesting, never seen that before.'

George Michael in Sydney, 1985 – one year later he would make the break and begin his solo career



CULTURE SHOCK

When Wham! became the first western band to play in China in April 1985, it was an incredible publicity stunt. But the 10-day tour was grounded in practicalities.

"The China trip was conceived to prevent our American tour being longer," reveals Andrew Ridgeley. "Yog had vocal polyps, which had to be carefully managed. We did around 30 dates for *Whamamerica!*, when normally bands would play 90 shows. That strain on Yog's voice could have precipitated it breaking down. The publicity of playing in China instead, that achieved what we wanted it to."

However, the reality of the country took its toll. "I found it overwhelming and confusing," admits Shirlie. "I don't like cruelty to animals. What I saw in China scarred me. I couldn't eat anything and lived on strawberry milkshakes."

"Shirlie was traumatised," adds Pepsi. "I was struggling, too, but was able to think: 'It's just a moment, it's going to end.' The good side of it were the firsts, in among the culture shocks. One of our guides had never had Coca-Cola. When we got some for him, it was like he was drinking the finest Champagne. But when we finally left China, we were all: 'Woah, that was heavy.'"

The tour at least continues to resonate, as Andrew smiles: "When I did signings for my book, one young chap handed me the dissertation he wrote at the London School Of Economics – it was on Wham! in China and the consequences of it."

But I assumed Wham! would only be around for a little while."

Young Guns promptly peaked at No.3, with one final hurdle facing Wham!: follow-up single *Bad Boys*. In the new film, George admits it was written to a formula and that it's his least favourite Wham! single by far, despite reaching No.2.

Andrew agrees, to a point: "It's a bloody good pop song with a great hook," he insists. "*Bad Boys* is a great dance track. If you rewrite the lyrics, Bob's your uncle. After the first two singles, we were again youth railing against the world. But *Bad Boys* is a less well enunciated take. *Wham! Rap* and *Young Guns* were both witty and tongue-in-cheek. *Bad Boys*? Yog would agree it's literally witless and just lacks that humour. Yog hated the song, I hate the video more."

HITTING THE CLUB

It was time to finish *Club Tropicana* properly. "*Club Trop* was pure Wham!," smiles Andrew. "That allowed us to throw off the *Rebel Without A Cause* social conscience element the music press were keen for Wham! to represent. In one fell swoop, *Club Trop* reset Wham!'s image and artistic direction. Its tone was different and it liberated us to write more songs like that."

With *Fantastic* being assembled, the decision *was* made that George should take sole control of Wham!'s songwriting. Barely anyone in pop history is as good a songwriter as George Michael, but still: the three songs Andrew co-wrote were all big hits. So why stop? "Because we had a miles better songwriter in the room, it's as simple as that," responds Andrew.

He's calm, explaining the decision as if it should be obvious. "Yog's songwriting was much better than mine. I genuinely felt he'd be able to shoulder those duties, so there was no point me trying to insist I should write, too.

"It was apparent that Yog could do it on his own. If I'd worked a little harder – or maybe at all – then things might have been different.

"But I saw things very black-and-white and felt I couldn't write songs of the same quality as Yog.

"It was an easy decision. In fact, it was so easy, it wasn't even a decision at all. The reality was, there was only one way Wham! could go."

A still from Wham!'s iconic *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go* promo video

Despite recognising George's talent, Andrew admits the other three originals on *Fantastic* were "filler at best," adding: "*Ray Of Sunshine* has something to it, but I can't even remember *Come On*." Fair enough, but *Nothing Looks The Same In The Light* is beautiful, a classic early George Michael ballad. Andrew throws *Classic Pop* the kind of disappointed look you give someone who's just ordered omelette and chips in a Chinese restaurant. "You think? It's so dreary, not my cup of tea at all."

Fantastic flew to No.1, meaning it was time for Wham!'s first full tour. *Classic Pop* is deeply jealous of anyone who attended the *Club Fantastic* live shows. Indeed, Andrew's favourite forgotten moment unearthed for *Wham! The Biography* is from a short film shown after Gary Crowley's supporting DJ set, where Wham! go back to Bushey Meads to gently tease Ted Halliwell, their old headmaster.

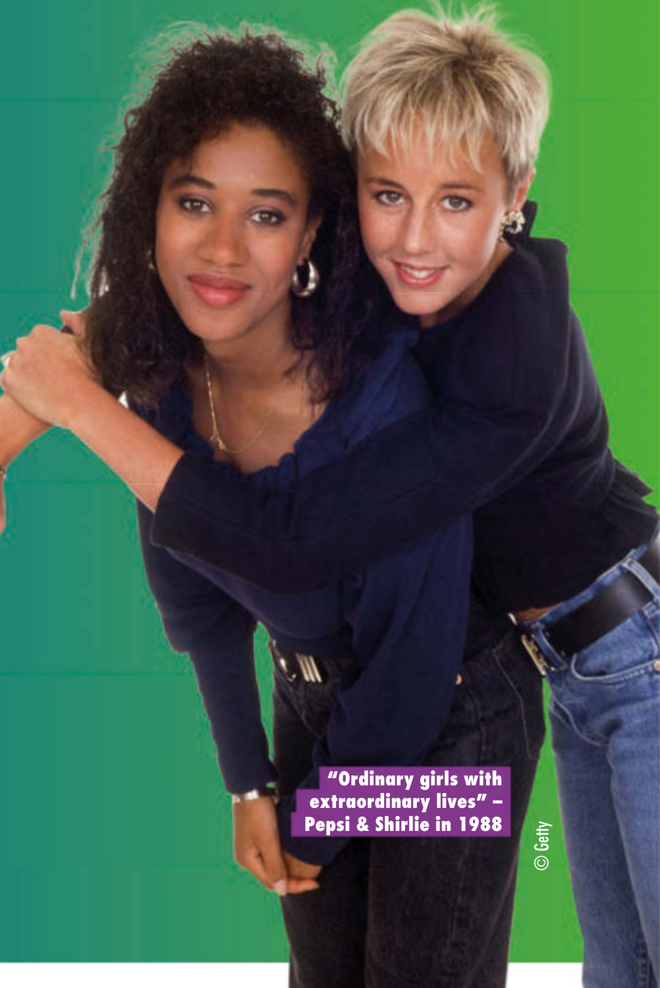
"I loved that tour," enthuses Andrew. "I hadn't changed since we started The Executive. All I'd ever wanted was to write songs and perform them. All the rest of it was bullshit. That tour, all of Wham!'s tours, were what I was in a band for. That was good enough for me."

Andrew's onstage confidence chimed with Pepsi & Shirlie loving life as Wham!'s dancers and backing vocalists. "George and Andrew were the pilots, me and Pepsi were the passengers," believes Shirlie. "We were the girls next door. We weren't models, we were ordinary girls with extraordinary lives. That made us relatable. So many girls said they wanted to be Pepsi & Shirlie, but that was really so they could get near George and Andrew. We had a healthy view that Wham! wasn't about us two, it was all about the two boys."

As the well-placed onlookers at blossoming megastardom, Pepsi & Shirlie's routines could also be relatably realistic, as Pepsi laughs: "We were taking everything in, so much so that I'd **sometimes look at Shirl and realise her arms were dancing the other way to mine in a routine. In the show,**

"GEORGE AND ANDREW WERE THE PILOTS, ME AND PEPSI WERE THE PASSENGERS. WE WERE THE GIRLS NEXT DOOR."

SHIRLIE KEMP



"Ordinary girls with extraordinary lives" – Pepsi & Shirlie in 1988

© Getty

we'd sometimes briefly walk offstage. Whenever I walked back onstage, it was like walking back into a fantasy."

Psychologically at least, the pair had a vital part to play, as Shirlie explains: "In the early days, I was a security blanket for George. He didn't have loads of confidence then. He'd sometimes literally grab hold of me for comfort during a show. He thought: 'I'm not ready to be up here on my own yet' and I felt we were his security."

SELF AWARENESS

George had disclosed his sexuality to Andrew and Shirlie during the filming of the *Club Tropicana* video. Unable to tell the wider world, he described the George Michael of Wham! as a "character" to display to the world while he was exploring his true self.

Ridgeley accepts he was fortunate to be able to be himself in Wham!, saying: "I'm pretty much as you see it. Wham! was a vehicle. Very early on, we understood that Wham! could only be temporary. For George to develop as a songwriter, he had to do it on his own, because Wham! was defined by the two of us. Essentially, Wham! was an expression of friendship made into music. That allowed George to write a certain style of song, which was limiting. Yog was the songwriter, but Wham! had parameters and constraints. That's why it could never be permanent."

Further constraints arrived when a nine-month dispute with Innervision prevented Wham! from recording, before signing to Sony. "Yog didn't write songs then," Andrew recalls. "The only new thing was *Whamshake*, a song that was close but just didn't have the wow factor. Then suddenly George came up with *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*. That was several quantum leaps forward from anything else. The chorus came first. When Yog played me it, set to a LinnDrum beat, I was: 'Wow! *That* has the magic.'"

It was Wham!'s first UK No.1 single, followed by *Freedom*, *I'm Your Man* and *The Edge Of Heaven*. Ridgeley much prefers *Make It Big*'s songwriting, explaining: "We had carte blanche and weren't so narrowly defined.

On *Make It Big*, the shackles were off and Yog went in any direction, with his voice the only defining factor.

"Yog rated his talents in descending order as songwriter, singer, producer. I'd rate him as singer, songwriter, producer, because his voice was just so powerful. He was an extraordinary singer who developed into an extraordinary songwriter. The essential magic in Yog's voice was always there, then he worked so hard at writing."

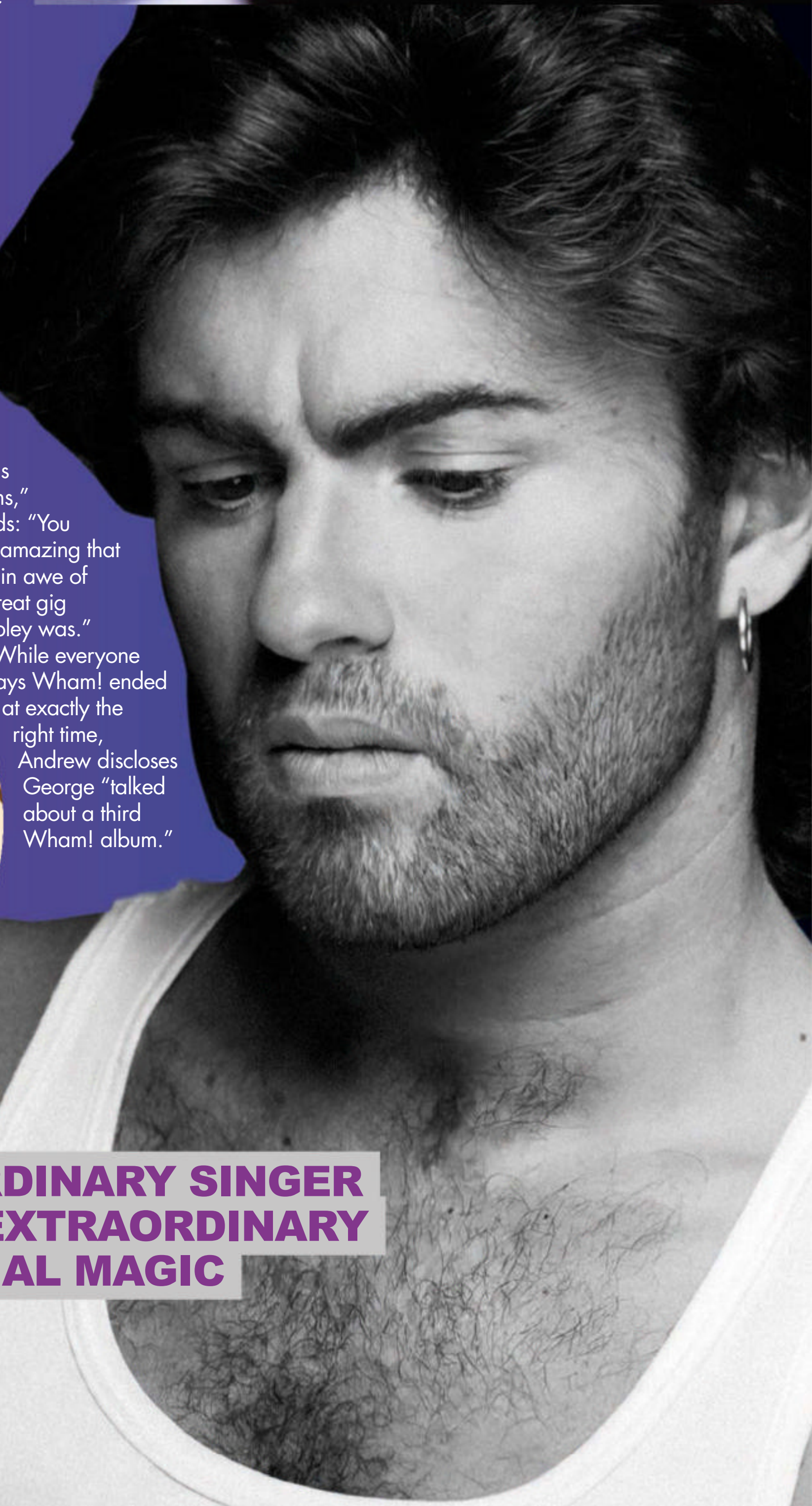
Make It Big saw Wham! conquer America, with the Whamamerica! stadium tour. "It was important for us, and especially Yog, to break the States," reflects Andrew. "That stadium tour sealed it. The support artists were nuts. The Pointer Sisters supported Wham!, which was just bonkers."

Wham! ended with their landmark show at Wembley Stadium on 28 June 1986. "The four of us had great moments in Wham!, but Wembley was a great moment for the fans," smiles Pepsi, as Shirlie nods: "You only appreciate now how amazing that show was. I'm in awe of what a great gig Wembley was."

While everyone says Wham! ended at exactly the right time, Andrew discloses George "talked about a third Wham! album."

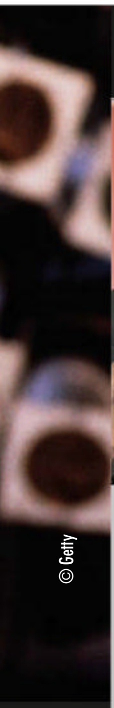
Gaining closure: Andrew and George in full flow at The Final concert at Wembley in June 1986

Club Fantastic: Pepsi & Shirlie



"GEORGE WAS AN EXTRAORDINARY SINGER WHO DEVELOPED INTO AN EXTRAORDINARY SONGWRITER. THE ESSENTIAL MAGIC WAS ALWAYS THERE."

ANDREW RIDGELEY



MAKE IT BIGGER?

The new singles boxset raises the question of what else could come from Wham!'s back catalogue. Unreleased songs *Soul Boy* and *Whamshake* are known about – but Andrew Ridgeley doubts that they'll ever emerge.

"*Whamshake* just didn't have it," he smiles. "It didn't have it then, so I very much doubt it would have it now. *Soul Boy* and the other unreleased song we had before *Young Guns*, they could have become fillers on *Fantastic*, but we didn't develop them beyond demos.

"As a music fan, I know songs like that are gold dust and why people want to hear them, but it won't happen. Yog only wanted to present the gems – everything else he did wasn't for public consumption. It's why he was far from prolific.

"So, working with George's estate, Dave Austin and I are very cautious about anything like unreleased music. There are limited options with what we could do with Wham!, because you have to be very careful not to dilute the potency and value of our songs. It's a very sensitive subject."

That means the infamous widely bootlegged electro version of *Wham! Rap* remixed by Francois Kervorkian is unlikely ever to officially emerge, too. But Andrew is open to a Wham! live album happening one day, revealing: "I'd hope at some point that we might be able to release a live album. That's certainly a possibility."

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He reveals: "I'm not sure I'd have wanted to jump through the same hoops for another year by that point. Our profile had become Premier League and it wasn't something I'd got into music for.

"It was an intrusion that I wasn't prepared to have, so I was quite content to step away."

How similar would Wham! Three have sounded to *Faith*? "The title track could quite easily have been a Wham! song, so could one or two others on that album."

Promoting *Make It Big* on BBC1's *Wogan*, Ridgeley was asked what he wanted to do next. Presciently, he replies: "I'd like to retire with grace." George, Andrew, Pepsi and Shirlie remained friends, having occasional informal Wham! reunions at George's house. But Andrew kept his promise. "I never had any ambition to have a career in music like Yog," he explains.

"I only ever wanted to be in a band with Yog and that was it. I obviously achieved that ambition and genuinely had no aspirations beyond that. Maybe that was the wrong decision, but I couldn't see myself making music with anyone else. It's not within me."

Tantalisingly, Ridgeley remixed *Club Tropicana* last year with TV/film composer Dru Masters. Is he about to make more music? "Never say never," he says, in a tone that suggests "Actually, you can say never." Is there anything further to come from Wham!? "Maybe there could be a Wham! hologram show like Abba's," ponders Shirlie. "That'd be amazing!" gasps Pepsi. "Our routines would evolve into being really slick. Those holograms? They would be really on it." ■

© Getty

Andrew Ridgeley at The George Michael Collection VIP Reception at Christies in London, 2019

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● Wham!'s compilation *The Singles: Echoes From The Edge Of Heaven* is released on 7 July and reviewed on page 88. *Wham! The Biography* is on Netflix from 5 July. Pepsi DeMacque-Crockett's debut novel *The Promise* is published by HarperFiction next spring. Andrew Ridgeley is taking part in a charity cycle ride across the length of Britain in aid of suicide prevention charity Papyrus. For more information and to donate, visit: www.linktr.ee/andrewridgeley

CLASSIC ALBUM

THE SENSUAL WORLD

KATE BUSH

BUSH'S SIXTH STUDIO ALBUM IS A HEADY COMING OF AGE STATEMENT – A VIBRANT AND POWERFUL CELEBRATION OF WOMANHOOD, INTERWOVEN WITH RICH TEXTURES, FOLK INSTRUMENTATION AND SOARING VOCALS

FELIX ROWE

One of Guido Harari's stunning shots of Kate for *The Sensual World* album campaign

© Guido Harari

THE PLAYERS

DEL PALMER
Kate's then-partner and long-time studio bassist and engineer across much of her recorded output, who also played/programmed her beloved Fairlight sampling synth, responsible for many of the classic textures.

DAVID GILMOUR
Pink Floyd's guitarist and Bush's early patron returned the favour on guitar. His contributions here are prominent in the mix, but also responsible for the very dated 80s guitar sound.

MICHAEL KAMEN
The famed American classical composer and arranger provided orchestral arrangements on three of the tracks, including landmark single *This Woman's Work*.

NIGEL KENNEDY
The punk rock violinist performs violin on *The Fog* and viola on *Heads We're Dancing*. Kennedy had played on record with Bush previously, echoing Bernard Herrmann's stabbing strings of *Psycho* on standalone single *Experiment IV*, from her chart-topping hits compilation, *The Whole Story*.

TRIO BULGARKA
A Bulgarian vocal ensemble (comprising Stoyanka Boneva, Yanka Rupkina and Eva Georgieva) who were instrumental in giving the album its otherworldly qualities. Kate Bush told the *Los Angeles Times*: "I've never worked with women on such an intense creative level". An inspired choice, Bush would go on to collaborate with them again on *The Red Shoes*.

MICK KARN
The former member of Japan lends his signature rubbery fretless bass guitar to *Heads We're Dancing*.

In a world of social media feeds clogged with spurious clickbait and AI-generated Papal puffer jackets, we must depend upon certain incontestable truths to provide grounding among the chaos: the Earth is round, one plus one is two, and – most importantly – Kate Bush is awesome. Where the genius, majesty and ongoing resonance of Ms Bush are concerned, personal opinion is irrelevant and resistance is futile. Even the eyebrow-raising headline of Kate Bush dislodging Harry Styles to top the charts on both sides of the Atlantic feels entirely plausible.

However genuinely unexpected her meteoric and record-breaking return to the public eye was last year, on reflection it's not so fanciful when you think about it. It's simply a reassuring affirmation of what we already knew: Kate Bush is an icon who transcends time and place, an artist equally at home dominating TikTok and Netflix as *Wogan* and re-runs of *Top Of The Pops 2*.

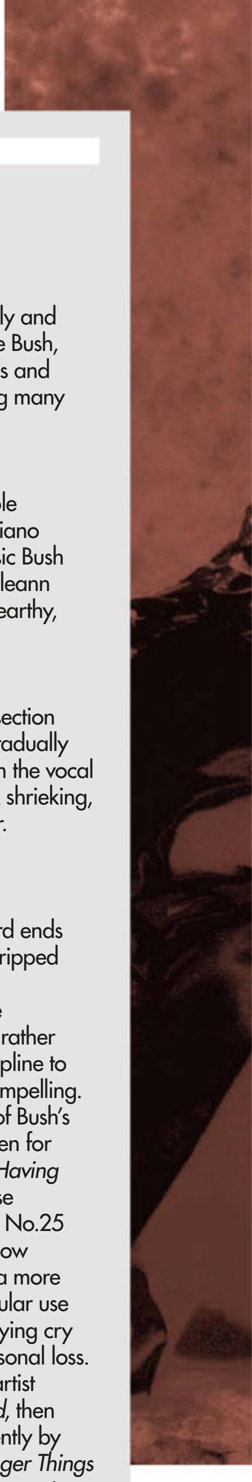
But eulogising and hyperbole aside, what could possibly be left to say about this woman's work that hasn't been said already? As we all know, it was the lead track from 1985's *Hounds Of Love* – *Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)* – that conquered 2022 and brought her to the attention of a new generation. But a dive into her wider catalogue beyond the well-trodden paths provides rich pickings. Kate's follow-up record, 1989's *The Sensual World*, is equally deserving of our adulation. Where *Hounds Of Love* whets the appetite, *The Sensual World* delivers a banquet to feast upon.

In comparison, her sixth studio album is less self-consciously cool than its predecessor, though it's just as compelling and sonically adventurous in ways that are not immediately apparent on first listen. What is clear instantly, though, is how it brims with its own self-contained confidence. Kate tones down some of the vocal eccentricity and bombast that made her name on earlier records for a fuller, more mature sound. The result is just as spellbinding and accomplished as any of her finest work, albeit coming from a different place.

Where *Running Up That Hill* has a New Wave feel, with its cold synths and jarring rhythms, *The Sensual World* draws its character from deeper roots, largely venturing into folk instrumentation. It's by no means Kate's first foray into traditional and world sounds, which are liberally scattered throughout her back catalogue. But it is arguably the most fully and consistently realised example. While all of Bush's output seems to exist in its own unique space, this record is unashamedly out of step with its surroundings. It has no concern with the zeitgeist, and it's this disregard that imbues it with honesty and authenticity.

The Sensual World is a warm, lushly orchestrated record, predominantly organic sounding and often dense in its arrangements, with much to unpick. Though there certainly are plenty of stand-outs,

WHERE *RUNNING UP THAT HILL* HAS A NEW WAVE FEEL, WITH ITS COLD SYNTHS AND JARRING RHYTHMS, *THE SENSUAL WORLD* DRAWS FROM DEEPER ROOTS



THE SONGS

1 THE SENSUAL WORLD
The album opens with the gentle peal of church bells, redolent of holy matrimony and perhaps fairytale escapism. The lovely folk instrumentation, notably the uilleann pipes performed by Davy Spillane, transports the listener to another place and time. The sound is pleasantly jarring to the ear, at once dissonant and off kilter, yet perfectly fitting for the mood it evokes. Kate's approach to the inclusion of the pipes was apparently "Well, why not?" and it's her endless openness to sonic experimentation that sets her apart from her peers. Her whispered coos of "Hmmm, yes" are not only sensual, but essential.

2 LOVE AND ANGER
The most upbeat and instant track on the record, the rhythmic tom tom drums drive it forwards, reminiscent of *Hounds Of Love*, with Kate's powerhouse vocal ascending above. It was the third single off the record, and her first single release of the 1990s (although technically belonging to the previous decade). Of all Bush's catalogue, it's one of her most straightforward uplifting and life-affirming songs, trading the usual eccentricity for a bombastic anthem most artists would die to have in their arsenal. It was a career best of all Kate's singles in the US, making No.1 on the Billboard Modern Rock Tracks chart (her only single ever to top a US chart, until, of course, everything changed in 2022).

3 THE FOG
Echoing the song's title, *The Fog* has a mysterious, misty quality and features some beautiful instrumental sections, with solo woodwind and sweeping strings weaving in and out of the orchestration. Beginning with a spoken-word recital from Kate and her dad, 'Dr Bush', it deals with the notion of a parent coming to terms with a child growing up and allowing themselves to let go. It was inspired by the memory of her father teaching her how to swim as a child, tapping into the themes of familial love and coming of age that recur throughout the whole of the record.

4 REACHING OUT
This once again speaks of the naivety of childhood, with the child "reaching out instinctively". The chorus features a belting vocal, surfing atop a canonical orchestral hook, courtesy of arranger Michael Nyman and the Balanescu Quartet string ensemble (whose other collaborations include David Byrne, Pet Shop Boys and Kraftwerk).

5 HEADS WE'RE DANCING
With its electro flourishes, samples programmed through Bush's trusty Fairlight synthesizer and percussive sounds, this is one of the more forward-thinking tracks in terms of sonics on the album, that wouldn't sound out of place on *Hounds Of Love*. The lyrics imagine her dancing with a mysterious, charming stranger at a social occasion, only to then discover that it was, in fact, the devil himself: Adolf Hitler. Though seemingly a far-fetched notion, and a slightly clunky lyric, it's actually rooted in some reality – a family member who experienced a similar encounter with one of the men responsible for developing the atomic bomb. Among its many textures, it features the trademark sound of Mick Karn, former bassist of Japan.

6 DEEPER UNDERSTANDING
"Are you lonely? Are you lost?" Kate sings, as the narrator, searching for solace in a computer program. In turn, her computer returns the call with comforting voices. The narrator's conversation with a computer is brought to life wonderfully by Bush's interplay with Bulgarian vocal ensemble Trio Bulgarka, contrasting with a sense of otherness. The clever touch is how human, emotive and organic the arrangement sounds, eschewing the obvious choice of a more electronic backdrop to the technological tale. The lush layered vocals in the outro are vaguely reminiscent of Enya, who was just breaking through around this time. More recently, *Deeper Understanding* reappeared in a different guise on *Director's Cut*.

7 BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN
One of the more unconventional musical arrangements, with interesting samples and rhythmic textures building up and interweaving to great effect. Vocally and in the arrangement, it's classic Kate Bush, with intricate melodies, vocal jumps and expressiveness. A stand-out among many highlights on the record.

8 NEVER BE MINE
A luscious, floaty song with a simple rhythm underneath and melodic piano accompaniment enhancing a classic Bush vocal. As with the title track, the uilleann pipes from Davy Spillane add an earthy, rootsy element.

9 ROCKET'S TAIL
Opening with an a capella vocal section from Trio Bulgarka, *Rocket's Tail* gradually builds into a riotous crescendo with the vocal group, echoes of Bush's trademark shrieking, and Gilmour's soaring Stratocaster.

10 THIS WOMAN'S WORK
Compared to the notably denser arrangements elsewhere, the record ends intimately, with the arrangement stripped right back to Kate's tender vocal, accompanied by her piano. Subtle orchestration enhances the mood, rather than overcrowding it, and the discipline to hold back makes it all the more compelling. *This Woman's Work* remains one of Bush's biggest ever tracks, originally written for the 1988 John Hughes film, *She's Having A Baby*. Though the original release (reworked for the album) stalled at No.25 on the UK chart, it's one of those slow burners that has gone on to have a more lasting impact, bolstered by its regular use in film and television, and as a rallying cry for millions who have suffered personal loss. It was covered by American R&B artist Maxwell – first on *MTV Unplugged*, then again in the studio, and more recently by Ella Henderson. Long before *Stranger Things* came along, Kate enjoyed a sync boost in 2005, reaching No.3 in the UK download chart when the song featured in the TV drama, *Walk Away And I Stumble*, the same year as she donated it for use in an NSPCC charity campaign.

it's a record less about individual moments than the sum of its parts – the myriad moods and the feelings it conjures. It's a heady brew to be devoured whole.

A COMING OF AGE

Bush's second album, *Lionheart*, was rush-released under pressure to capitalise on the surprise success of *Wuthering Heights*. Personally underwhelmed by the results, Bush vowed henceforth to take full artistic control, giving each new album the breathing space to satisfy her own quality standards. Ensconced in her own self-built studio, the length between each new record has famously grown exponentially. With just over four years separating its release from *Hounds Of Love* (also punctuated by her first 'Greatest Hits' album *The Whole Story* in 1986), *The Sensual World* marked an important milestone, not just in her career but on a personal level.

Wuthering Heights is often held up as the archetypal 'coming of age' record – an expression of teenage desire and sexual awakening. As Kate acknowledged, *The Sensual World*, which was recorded as she turned 30 years old, represents another coming of age – not just physically but emotionally. Again taking cues from literary source material, it's an exploration of womanhood, moving the story forwards from imaginary youthful fantasies towards a sensuality experienced on a deeper level. Carnal pleasures are still clearly in her mind (see the opening track) but so is parenthood (see the closing track). In between, we're treated to musings on parental love as a child flies the nest, with Kate herself positioned somewhere between the two, able now to empathise with each perspective.

Bush has acknowledged her deliberate attempt on this record

Critically heralded, the album received two nominations at the Brits and one at the Grammys

© Guido Harari

to use womanhood as a powerful instrument of expression – not in relation to manhood, but as a force in its own right. It's her self-confessed 'grown-up' record. Although she didn't become a mother until some years later, it's certainly a key theme that's central throughout. Speaking to *Q* at the time, she called it "definitely my most personal, honest album," and this integrity shines through. The repeated lyric "the thrill and the hurting" (on *Never Be Mine*) neatly sums up the many emotions on display on *The Sensual World* – from love (and anger) and lust, to longing and loneliness.

Retrospective appraisals evaluating Kate's wider discography have pitched *The Sensual World* as her autumnal album (as compared to, say, her wintery LP, *50 Words For Snow*). The analogy is fitting; it's a rich, sumptuous and colourful sounding record, exuding warmth, like a thick blanket that envelops the listener. But more than that, there's a recurring theme of transition, moving from one state (or stage of life) to another; a passage of time, reaching maturity of both body and soul.

Musically, there's much to draw from each repeated listen, as new sounds and textures emerge from the fog. The record showcases a varied range of musicians – her usual house band (including brother Paddy and partner Del Palmer) enhanced with some inspired guest features, from violin rebel Nigel Kennedy and the Trio Bulgarka, to Japan's Mick Karn and her one-time mentor, David Gilmour. The Bulgarian trio manage the impressive feat of producing vocals as otherworldly, ethereal and evocative as Kate herself. While elsewhere synths might have been used to create depth and otherworldly textures, the unusual vocals play as the counterpoint to Bush's voice.

The great irony is the big-name contributions from Gilmour are the album's only incongruous moments, sticking out like a sore thumb. While Bush's output is quite rightly described as timeless, Gilmour's squealing, late-80s Van Halen guitar tone is very much a product of its era. Gilmour's mere presence alone is in itself an interesting illustration of how far Kate had come, too. Back in the mid-70s, he was her rock star mentor and benefactor, using his industry clout to help the young teen secure a deal. By this point, however, just over a decade later, the tables have turned markedly: it's now Kate who is the iconic star, giving him the leg up and making him cool by association.

While, musically, *The Sensual World* is deeply rooted in organic sounds and universal truths, Kate's fascination with technology is reflected in some eerily prescient lyrics for 1989. *Deeper Understanding* considers a lonely person looking for comfort and solace in their computer. With today's obsession with social media likes and the scary advances in AI, Bush essentially wrote the script for *Black Mirror* several decades in advance.

The title track, which opens the record, has an enchanting circular quality; with no discernible verse and chorus, the lines are delivered in a stream of consciousness (note how the first main line starts with the word 'and', as if it's an ongoing

BUSH HAS ACKNOWLEDGED HER DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO USE WOMANHOOD AS A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT OF EXPRESSION – AS A FORCE IN ITS OWN RIGHT

Kate Bush's sixth LP was her "most personal, honest album" yet

THE CURE'S ROBERT SMITH NAMED *THE SENSUAL WORLD* HIS FAVOURITE SINGLE, HIS FAVOURITE ALBUM, AND ITS CREATOR THE BEST THING ABOUT THE 80s

THE VIDEOS

THE SENSUAL WORLD

Sunlight shimmers on water as if to signify a dream sequence, before cutting to Kate donning a floaty medieval gown and headdress, meandering through a forest. Removing the formal head garb to let her hair flow in the wind is symbolic of freedom and liberation. Fires then rage in the background – perhaps a nod to her burning desire; perhaps a reference to "setting fire to the cornfields" elsewhere on the record [*Never Be Mine*]. Then it's night-time with a full moon in the background, signalling her passage through space and time. Co-directed by Bush, alongside *The Comic Strip*'s Peter Richardson, the visuals are as dreamlike, earthy and enchanting as the song itself.

THIS WOMAN'S WORK

Kate is sat at a grand piano in a formal black tie, with her hair up, perhaps representing the man whose eyes the song is seen through. Echoing the scenes from *She's Having A Baby* for which it was originally conceived, her performance is intercut with scenes of a man in a hospital waiting room (actor Tim McInnerny, best known as Darling from *Blackadder*) worrying about the fate of his loved one, Bush, who is in theatre next door. Kate comforts him in his imagination, as flashback scenes show her fainting at dinner and being rushed to hospital. He imagines her death, before apparent redemption in the closing moments.

LOVE AND ANGER

Kate kneels down on the floor in a spotlight on an otherwise black stage, in a contemporary black dress. She is then surrounded by ballet dancers contrasting in white dresses, who emerge from the shadows, before disappearing back into the dark. Kate holds a ceremonial gold bejewelled staff and orb, signifying power of office – a sovereign or pope, judging from the male dancers' outfits. The final third brings Bush out of this fantasy world and into a more standard pop performance video format, with the band playing on stage, including a very Dad Rock-looking David Gilmour noodling away with obvious satisfaction.

conversation), punctuated by the utterances of pleasure, "Oh yes", which leave little to the imagination. Despite lacking an explicit hook, it's subtly anthemic and sublime. Bush's original intent was to recite Molly Bloom's soliloquy from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, an inspiration that she felt fitted the track and sentiment perfectly. When permission was not granted by the Joyce estate, she instead wrote her own lyrics inspired by Molly coming out of the page. Finally, some 22 years later on *Director's Cut* Bush was granted permission to use the lyrics and reverted back to the original intent with *Flower Of The Mountain*.

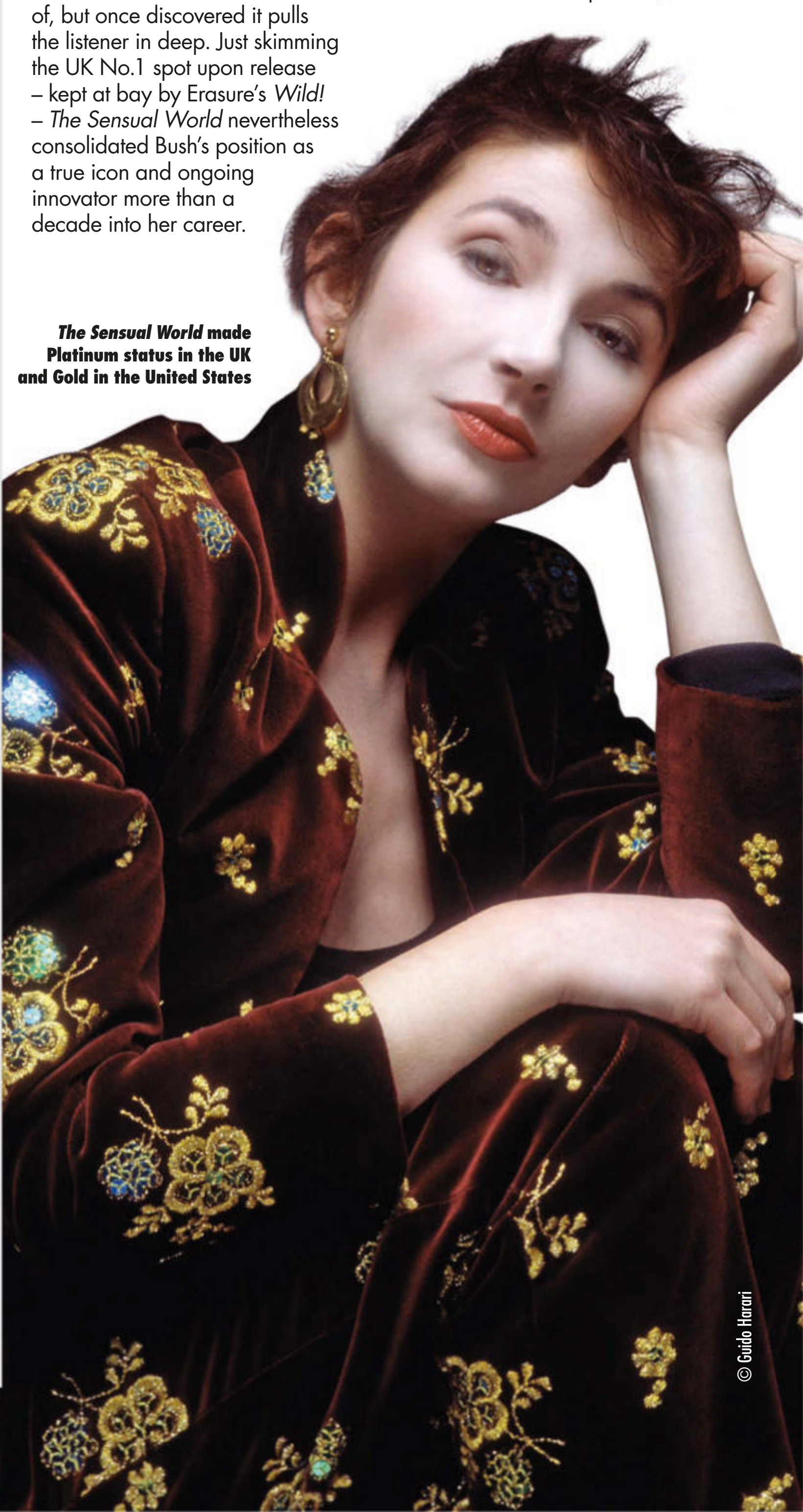
It may never be the first Kate Bush record that most would think of, but once discovered it pulls the listener in deep. Just skimming the UK No.1 spot upon release – kept at bay by Erasure's *Wild!* – *The Sensual World* nevertheless consolidated Bush's position as a true icon and ongoing innovator more than a decade into her career.

It also provided her highest ever US charting single (until last year) with *Love And Anger*.

With a greatest hits compilation rolled out in 1986, pointedly titled *The Whole Story*, the implication seemed to suggest a finality.

In fact, as we know, this wasn't the case at all, with some of Bush's finest work still yet to come. The Cure's Robert Smith named *The Sensual World* his favourite single, his favourite album, and its creator the best thing about the 80s, which is high praise indeed.

The Sensual World is a sign of an artist maturing, stretching her wings and exploring new depths to her characters, while losing none of her individual sparkle.



***The Sensual World* made Platinum status in the UK and Gold in the United States**

© Guido Harari

The Kate Inside

The Limited Edition Book

KATE BUSH
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
GUIDO HARARI
1982 | 1993

*"I love to work with Guido.
He makes you feel special
without ever saying anything.
I think of him as an artist
as well as a photographer."*
- Kate Bush

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- 240 pages, over 300 photographs
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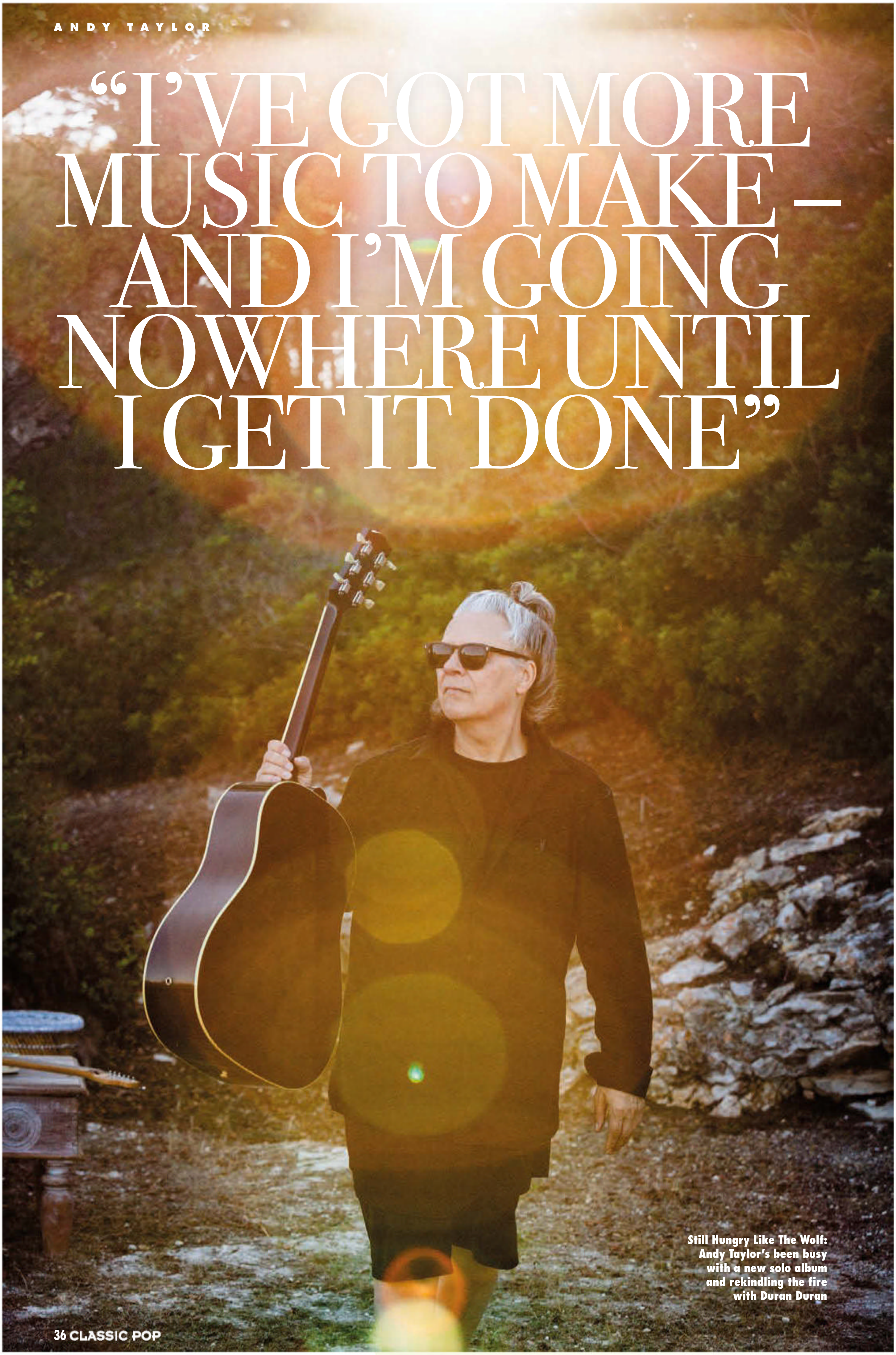
"I'VE GOT MORE MUSIC TO MAKE – AND I'M GOING NOWHERE UNTIL I GET IT DONE"



Still Hungry Like The Wolf: Andy Taylor's been busy with a new solo album and rekindling the fire with Duran Duran

REFUSING TO BE DRAGGED UNDER BY HIS TERMINAL CANCER DIAGNOSIS, ANDY TAYLOR HAS NOT ONLY BEEN PLAYING GUITAR ON A NEW DURAN DURAN ALBUM BUT ALSO MAKING HIS FIRST SOLO RECORD FOR 33 YEARS. EXPLAINING THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC IN STAYING STRONG DURING HIS ILLNESS, HE TELLS *CLASSIC POP* HOW EASY IT'S BEEN WITH HIS OLD BANDMATES, WHY HE LEFT TWICE OVER… AND HIS HOPES OF GETTING BACK ONSTAGE.

JOHN EARLS

"Frankie Goes To Hollywood? They were good boys, it's lovely to see them back. I had a messy show with them in Paris once. I got up to play with them in the encore. When I put my guitar on, they'd put an elastic strap on it. There were 10,000 people in the arena, while I was trying to play *Relax* with an elasticated guitar bouncing up and down on my body. Frankie were pissing themselves."

This is how Andy Taylor introduces himself to *Classic Pop*, over Zoom from his home in Ibiza the afternoon after Frankie's comeback performance at Eurovision.

Given how his terminal cancer was so publicly revealed during Duran Duran's induction at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame last year, you might expect Taylor to appear vulnerable and a little weary. Instead, Duran Duran's old guitarist is a vital force, rattling off terrific pop tales at a rate of knots. Before our interview, his manager tells us: "You'll like Andy. Proper rock and roll, ever so garrulous." He wasn't wrong.

Andy is here, at least nominally, to discuss *Man's A Wolf To A Man*. Only his third solo album – and his previous collection, 1990's *Dangerous*, was a covers record – it's as unpredictable, sparky and joyful as the man himself, switching from the glam of *This Will Be Ours* to the robofunk of *Reachin' Out To You* via wistful ballad *Big Trigger*, all with a restless energy.

The album's genesis is inevitably eccentric, as Taylor explains: "I had a FaceTime call come up: 'Hartwig Masuch, BMG CEO.' I thought: 'The CEO of BMG? I'd better take this.' Hartwig told me he was a long-time fan. He was a very personable guy, one of the few CEOs of a record label who doesn't have lizard-like tendencies."

The exec said he'd love Andy to make whatever album he wanted for his label, perhaps a new Power Station record? "I told him that wasn't very easy," laughs Taylor. "Most of The Power Station are dead. Even John Taylor has come close a couple of times."

With a potential record deal unexpectedly arriving, the guitarist followed the ethos of his former Power Station bandmate, Robert Palmer. "Robert's rule was: 'You can go

anywhere you want,'" reveals Taylor. "When you're expressing a song, so long as you have the feeling of 'I love this and I've nailed it,' you can work out afterwards which songs work together. Robert was an absolute master of going everywhere – you can't get two more different cultures than *Addicted To Love* and *Pressure Drop*.

"After Hartwig's call, suddenly I'd been given the freedom to do what the fuck I want again. Great! There's a big collective consumption of different music throughout my life, but I always get back to Bowie and The Beatles."

Although he's been a producer for Rod Stewart and Gun, Andy is drawn to bands: not just Duran Duran, but consistently playing with Reef, too. *Man's A Wolf To A Man* was written and produced with The Almighty singer Ricky Warwick and Swedish electronica artist Mattias Lindblom. "The album was all made in one room, with one or other of Ricky and Mattias," notes Taylor. "I don't think you need more than two people to write a song, despite the current pop world's way of eight writers on everything. My process is very band-oriented. I prefer having that other person for checks and balances on songs. Otherwise, I start having weird conversations with myself: 'What do you think, Andy?' 'Well, Andy, now that you ask…'

Initially completed before the pandemic, Taylor used lockdown to reassess the album. The big change was ensuring that he sang it all. Reef's Gary Stringer had sung on most of the album initially. Andy's wife Tracey was key in the change, as he reveals: "My wife was particularly the one saying: 'Why aren't you singing more on the album?' She doesn't normally get involved in that side of my work, so that made me think: 'Hmm…'

Tracey's concerns over her husband getting to express himself were partly because, as Andy states simply: "I was thinking this was going to be my last album. My cancer diagnosis was only heading one way."

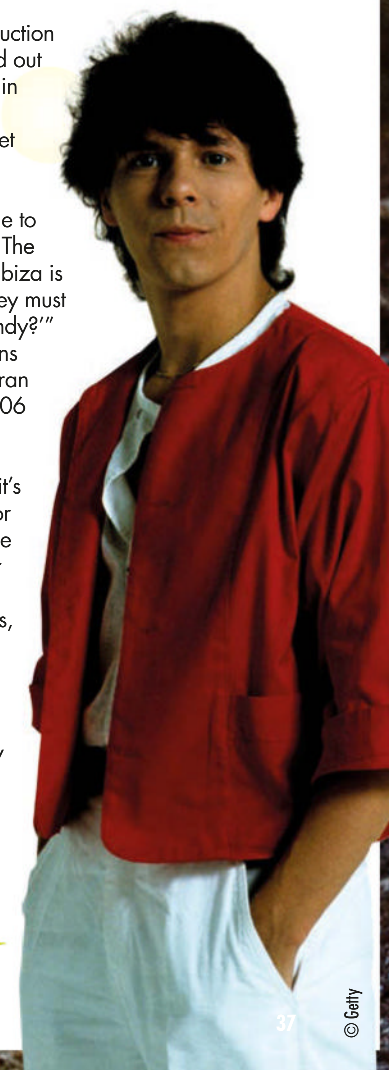
While Taylor's stage four prostate cancer diagnosis was made public last November, he's been living with the illness since 2018. He's bleakly funny describing how keeping his condition private nearly scuppered his reunion with Duran, revealing: "By the time we found out Duran were getting inducted into the Hall Of Fame, we'd been discussing a couple of other projects.

"The weekend our induction was announced, it turned out Duran were going to be in Ibiza. So of course, they were going: 'Hey, let's get together!' But I was in London, having cancer treatment and was unable to say anything to anyone. The one time Duran were in Ibiza is the one time I wasn't. They must have thought: '*Really*, Andy?'"

There are many reasons Andy's distance from Duran Duran since he left in 2006 during the *Red Carpet Massacre* sessions has been so vague. Chiefly, it's because neither Andy nor the band see it as anyone else's business. As Taylor puts it: "My rule is, if it's not been said in the press, I won't talk about it."

But now that there's an ease between all the band again, Taylor is happy to confirm it really was a simple musical difference that led to his departure. Andy states: "I couldn't do the Timbaland album, because it just didn't move me. I was

Young Romantic: Andy Taylor pictured in 1983



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Andy (second from left) produced Reef's 2022 album ***Shoot Me Your Ace***

saying to the others: 'Why do we need this?' There's so much talent in that band, I never felt the need to bring other people in to write with Duran. It bugged me.

"It wasn't about getting my own way. But if the force is against you, it's difficult. When you're older, band rules can become very difficult. The band rule was: 'The band comes first' and I thought, 'No.'

"The general feeling was 'You should come with us over here' and I just couldn't. I don't know what it is with me that means I just can't do that. It felt like someone shutting an elevator door on me that I couldn't get past. There has to be a balance, and I couldn't feel it. I had the same feeling as I had when I left during *Notorious*: 'I'm going to miss all this... again.'"

Andy is mature and easy-going enough to recognise that what felt incredibly important 17 years ago shouldn't get in the way of the relationships he'd forged decades before. "We've been through some crazy shit together," he laughs. "I've thought a lot about what happened when we were youngsters. All of it comes back, including why I left.

"You re-evaluate it and realise that perpetuating arguments over petty things is pointless, because the only person you're really falling out with is yourself.

"A band is an entity, it's not about one person. Duran Duran is a living entity. When you think about its journey, the bad bits are amplified too often. When the dust settled, there was no animosity there. It was creative, not personal. We're Pink Floyd in reverse."

"WE'VE BEEN THROUGH SOME CRAZY SHIT TOGETHER IN DURAN DURAN. I'VE THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED WHEN WE WERE YOUNGSTERS."

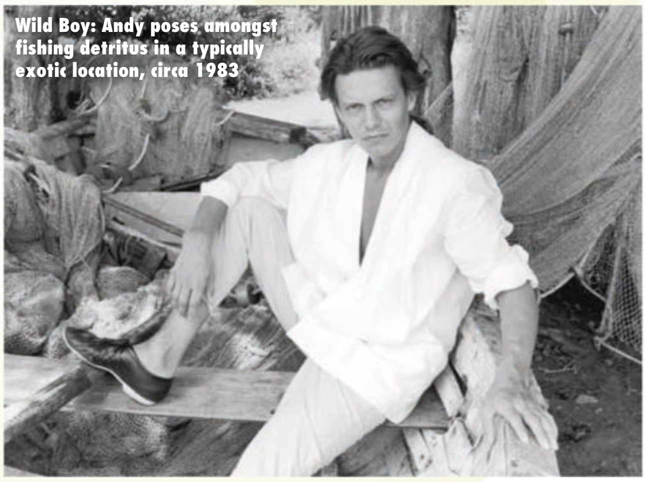
That creative relationship has been restored on Duran Duran's new album. Inspired by last year's Halloween-themed gig in Las Vegas, it sees the band cover several suitably spooky songs including *Paint It Black*, *Ghost Town* and Cerrone's *Supernature*, as well as goth-tinged reworkings of Duran tunes such as *Secret Oktober*, *New Moon On Monday* and *Shadows On Your Side*. "Simon is in great voice on the album," enthuses Taylor. "There's a particularly great cover of Siouxsie And The Banshees' *Spellbound* and our reworked *Night Boat* is fucking fantastic. It's a fun record.

"I just loved playing with them again. We probably didn't understand it when we were young, but we know what we're about now. John's bass playing is tight as fuck: him and Roger are one proper rhythm section. Having the original rhythm section is a big thing for a band. Not to criticise anyone else, but when me, John and Roger play together, there's nothing quite on a par with it. I've found that again on the new record. It was: 'Yes, that's my place!' so quickly."

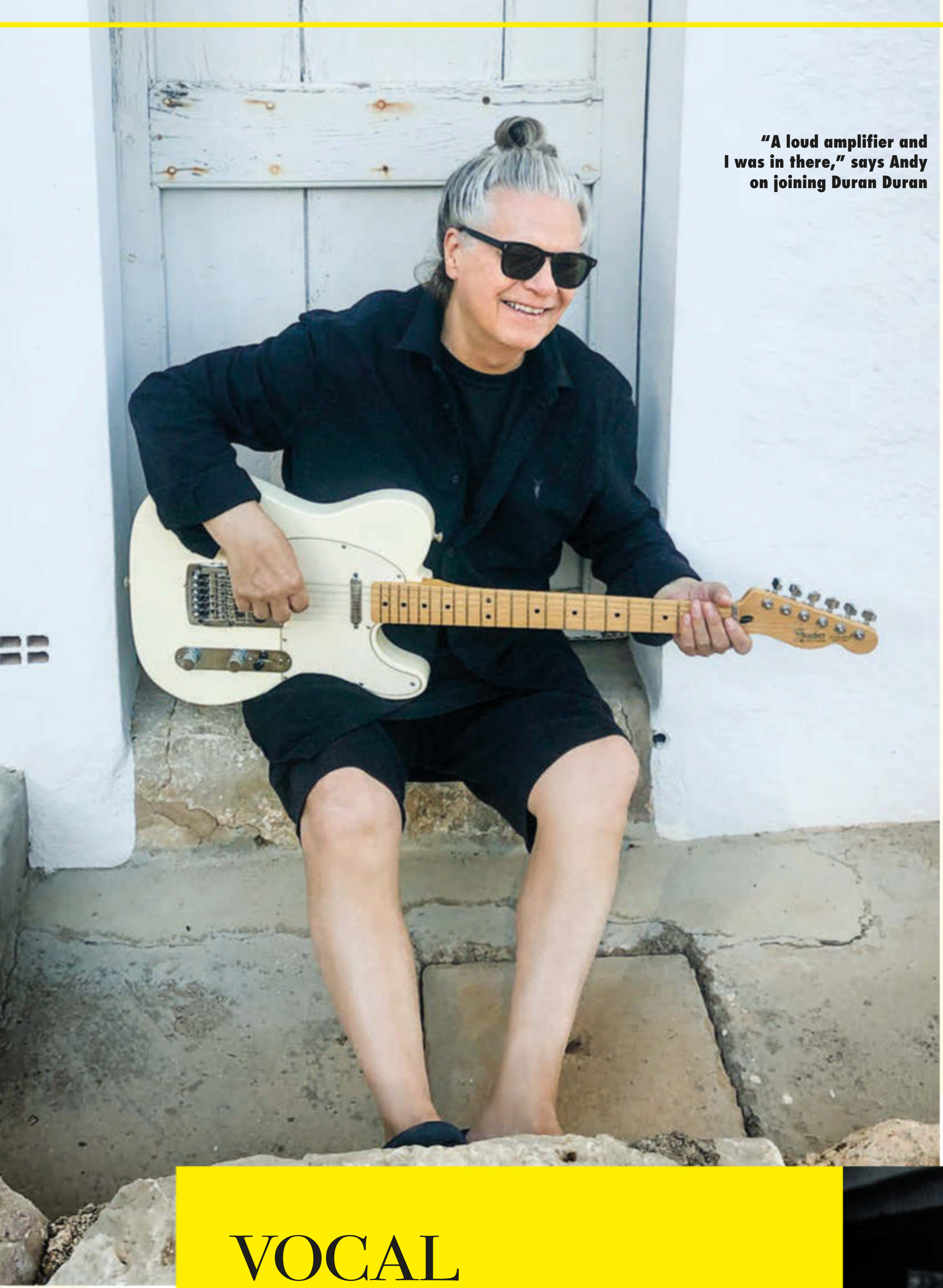
Seeing Andy talk so enthusiastically about Duran Duran, his blond manbun bouncing with glee, is wonderful. An enigma who's generally kept his counsel about being part of the world's biggest band in the 80s, Taylor explains of his attitude: "I avoid playing up to my red carpet alter-ego. I created that alter-ego and at one point it merged into my daily life. I created a monster, along with four other monsters. Duran was a hydra-headed monster, and I like to think I'm in recovery from the music business."

If Andy is level-headed now, that wasn't always the case. He knew Duran Duran were something special from the moment he came from Newcastle to Birmingham to audition for them in 1980. "There wasn't much actual song material," he smiles. "They had the chorus of *Girls On Film* and that was about it. But once we started jamming stuff, an attitude came out. I'd been around every musician in Newcastle, but something different was going on in Duran. Our only gear was a shitty

Guys On Film (clockwise from top left): Nick Rhodes, Simon Le Bon, Andy Taylor, Roger Taylor and John Taylor , 1981



Wild Boy: Andy poses amongst fishing detritus in a typically exotic location, circa 1983



"A loud amplifier and I was in there," says Andy on joining Duran Duran

amp and a distortion box I could get some juice out of. But that juice, plus Nick and John's make-up and weird shoes, it was enough.

"I was never destined to work in the shipyards, as I wanted to be Mick Ronson. I wanted to be the guy wearing make-up, and the vibe of The Rum Runner helped Birmingham feel like another planet. Another band, Fashion, would hang out at The Rum Runner with us. They were really cool, too, and I thought: 'We don't have this in Newcastle!'

"The silver nail in my coffin for becoming a glamorous pop star was Duran's manager, Paul Berrow. He had a BMW, and in April 1980 owning a BMW was like owning a space shuttle. I realised: 'This is where I need to be!'

"If all that wasn't enough, there was the name. I was a fan of *Barbarella*, so when I answered the audition ad and was told 'We're called Duran Duran', I thought 'Yeah, clever.' Duran Duran is a name like Coca-Cola, it just rolls off the tongue.

"Led Zeppelin is a big name, Duran Duran is an arty and sexy name. Nick and John: one is Duran and the other is Duran, too. They were Duran and Duran. The band was their baby."

Despite being the newcomer, Andy was easily able to find his place in Duran. "I had a 100-watt Marshall amp," he chuckles. "A loud amplifier and I was in there. The Berrow brothers said that, without a guitarist, America would be out of reach. EMI said it, too, that they had more faith in Duran than a lot of other synth acts because we had a guitarist.

"In America, our contemporaries were Prince, Michael Jackson and Van Halen. Two of the best guitarists

VOCAL GYMNASTICS

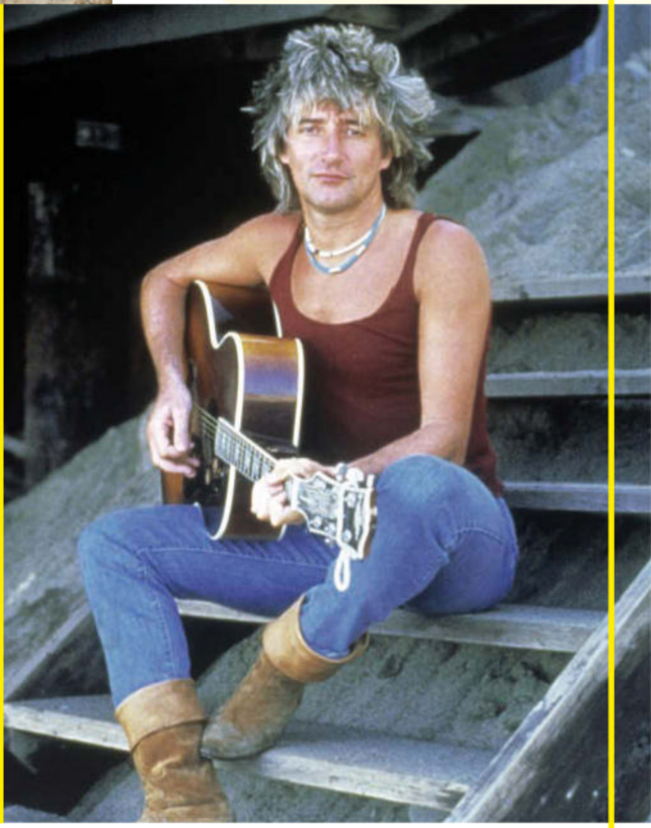
Having decided he should sing more on *Man's A Wolf To A Man*, Andy realised that he had some good mentors to draw from.

"I've been around some incredible singers," he smiles. "Learning to sing is just like learning to play guitar when I was a kid.

"Robert Palmer was a master at vocal technique, as he was lyrics and song construction. In an elevator once, Robert showed me some vocal tricks in 15 seconds on how he got that incredible resonance to his voice.

"That was unbelievable advice, but when you're around good singers you're going to learn some tricks. As well as Simon, I worked with Curtis King, who Bernard Edwards brought into Chic. But the greatest practical advice I've learned was from Rod Stewart. When I was producing Rod, he told me: 'I'll do it three times and that's me done.' He'd sing it three times, bugger off to play football and the results would be amazing. Rod showed me that, ultimately, you've just got to sing it. Of course, that's OK if you're Rod Stewart.

"The more you find your voice, the deeper you go into yourself," he continues. "You express yourself more, rather than just generically singing something."



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in the world, while Jackson sang with some of the greats. The guitar was still huge in America."

The Power Station allowed Andy and John to hone their rock side, a band even more successful in the States than back home in the UK, featuring Chic's Bernard Edwards and Tony Thompson as well as Robert Palmer. "I love The Power Station album," says Taylor. "But when I listen to it, there's a little sadness. Tony, Bernard and Robert were all young when they died. I used to call it 'The Curse Of The Power Station' – and then it happened to me.

"But that album also brings home what a great time it was. Duran Duran never planned any of it but when we got together it was like everyone had been waiting their whole life for that moment. As soon as we hit the go button, we were successful everywhere around the world. To this day, we've got the most successful Bond song. That's mental.

Exotic locale: Duran Duran at Atagoyama, a small mountain located in the heart of Tokyo, May 1982

REPORTAGE TO MAKE HEADLINES?

Having completed work on a brand new Duran Duran album, fans will be keen to know if Andy is willing to finish one he began with the band in between *Astronaut* and his aborted role in *Red Carpet Massacre*.

The story of *Reportage*, the album nearly finished with Beck producer Michael Patterson in 2005, has become an integral part of the band's folklore. It was intended to be a return to Duran's New Wave roots, before they decided at the last minute to make a more cutting-edge album with Timbaland.

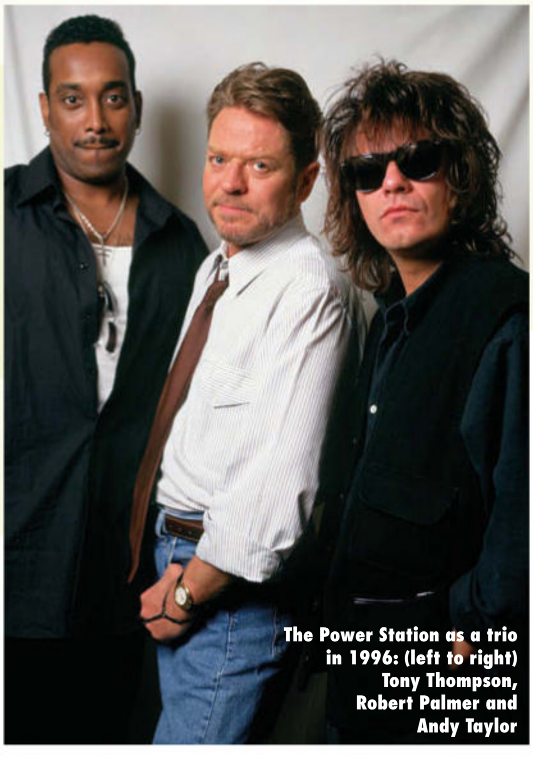
For several years, Nick Rhodes has told *CP* that *Reportage* is 80% complete and will get released – if Andy is willing to finish recording his guitar parts. Over to Andy. "We have to finish *Reportage*," he nods. "We have to stop talking about it and just do it. And I know we can do it.

"I love playing guitar. If working through that old material and playing guitar on it is what's needed to get those tracks together, that's good for me. If there's a method to do that, let's just do it.

"If we can do it all remotely and we can get it right, great," he adds. "My creative brain is still really fluent, so if anyone wants an album finishing off? I'm your boy."

"When *Some Like It Hot* came out, that was No.2 while *A View To A Kill* was No.1. One thing I was sensible about in my mid-twenties was to realise: 'Kid, you ain't ever going to surpass this.'"

As stellar as life was, the accepted wisdom around Duran Duran is that their side projects helped splinter the band. Was The Power Station's tour of the US as debauched as everyone claims? "I couldn't possibly comment," insists Andy, briefly clamming up. He reasons: "Duran have always been a class act.



The Power Station as a trio in 1996: (left to right) Tony Thompson, Robert Palmer and Andy Taylor

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They don't try to sell themselves on the debauchery. I love The Rolling Stones but, whenever you think about them now, what comes to mind first is the lifestyle. Duran have always aspired to have a touch of class. Despite my shit shoes, they've maintained that.

"What I will say about that Power Station tour is that, after the commercial success with the album, Robert dropped out. It was only meant to be a one-off album anyway so, without Robert, what was the point? There was no point to that tour, apart from 'Let's have a laugh.' I will say there's only bits of it that I can remember."

It was during The Power Station that Taylor began to have doubts about life in Duran. He remembers a drunken interview with Robert in Japan – "They had these sake machines on the street, and the interview was at 10am" – which was so chaotic that an EMI rep tore into the pair, accusing them of disrespecting their TV interviewer. Andy remembers: "The EMI guy was saying: 'Don't you care about your career?' I told him: 'What career? How do I get promoted?

"That was what I began to find frustrating. I was in my mid-twenties and was thinking: 'Where do I go from here?'

"But that's the point where the music industry should have stepped in to help.

"I'll take every bullet I deserve for leaving the band. But why is it always the members of a band who are at fault when it stops?

"In music, it's only ever the surface that gets reported. Duran were falling apart. Roger wasn't well. I was having doubts. All of the industry people who had dined out on Duran Duran from the very start? When it was time for them to be honourable, to stand up and help us, they weren't there."

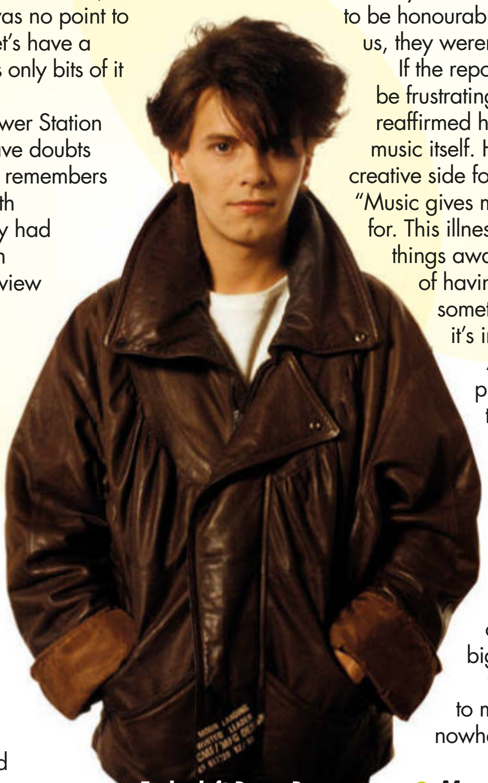
If the reportage around Duran can be frustrating, Andy's illness has reaffirmed his belief in the power of music itself. He's never taken the creative side for granted and says now: "Music gives me a destination to aim for. This illness takes so many other things away, so the motivation of having music giving me something of worth in my life, it's invaluable."

Andy is having pioneering cancer treatment that he hopes will prolong his life by several years. As he explains: "I'm truly blessed to get this new treatment.

"There's a lot to it yet, but getting back on stage one day is a big marker for me.

"I've got more music to make – and I'm going nowhere until I get it done." ■

"DURAN NEVER PLANNED ANY OF IT BUT WHEN WE GOT TOGETHER IT WAS LIKE EVERYONE HAD BEEN WAITING THEIR WHOLE LIVES FOR THAT MOMENT"



Taylor left Duran Duran twice, once in 1986 and then again in 2006

● ***Man's A Wolf To A Man* will be released via BMG next year**

© Alamy

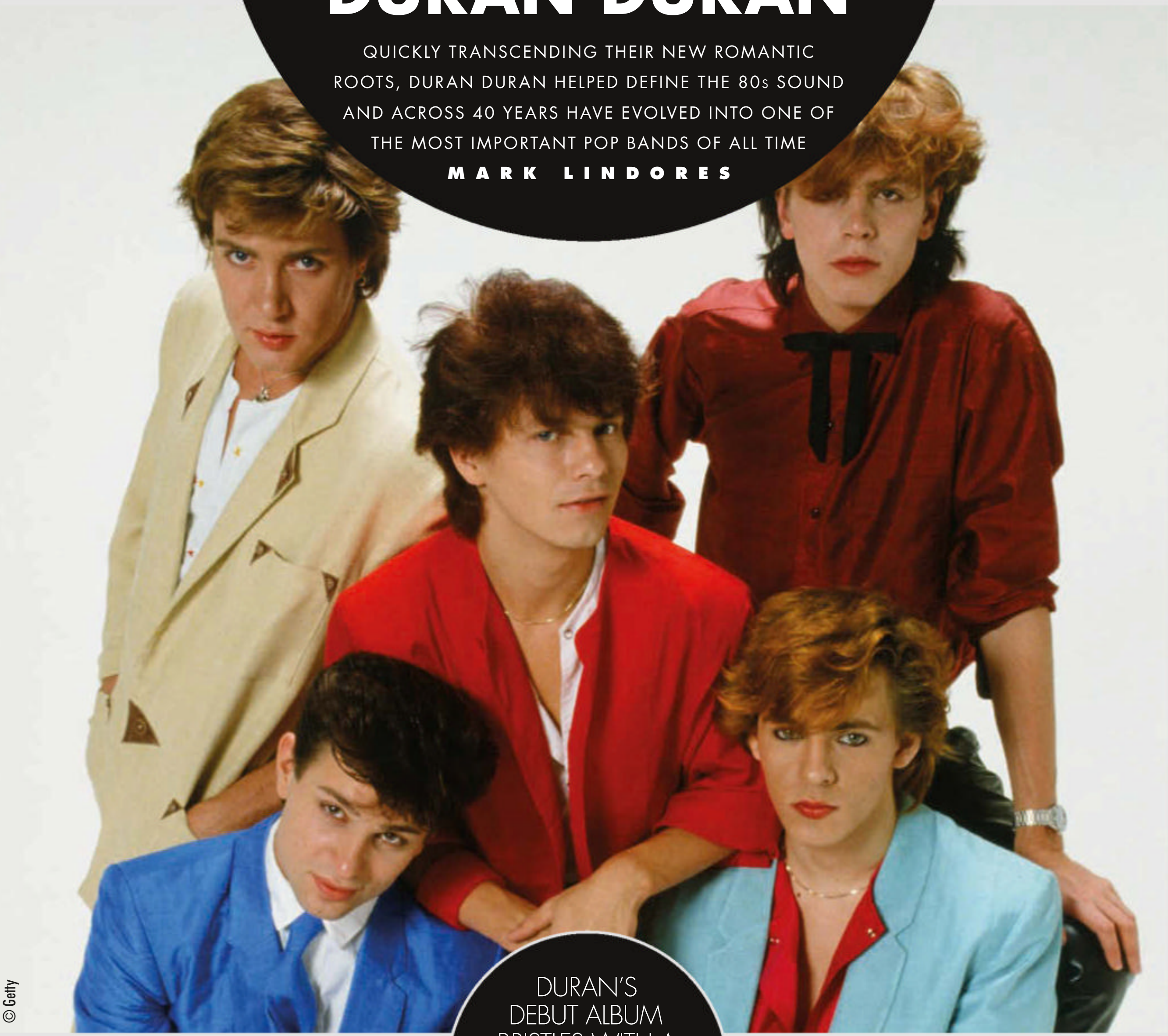
Andy joins Reef on stage at 2021's Victorious Festival in Portsmouth

ALBUM BY ALBUM

DURAN DURAN

QUICKLY TRANSCENDING THEIR NEW ROMANTIC ROOTS, DURAN DURAN HELPED DEFINE THE 80s SOUND AND ACROSS 40 YEARS HAVE EVOLVED INTO ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT POP BANDS OF ALL TIME

MARK LINDORES



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For all the excitement and optimism that typically accompanies the dawning of a new decade, the 80s began at something of a musical crossroads. The implosion of punk and the death of disco had left a gaping void. And with London throbbing to the sounds of icy synth-pop and Manchester championing the dark post-punk of Joy Division, the country's musical landscape was as bleak as its political climate. Fortunately, a glimmer of hope was on the horizon thanks to a Birmingham-based quintet intent on escaping England's grey industrial heartland.

The Duran Duran story had begun in 1978 when Nick Rhodes and John Taylor, two schoolfriends with a mutual love of David Bowie, Roxy Music, Chic and the Sex Pistols, formed a band with Stephen Duffy, based out of Birmingham's Rum Runner club – the epicentre of the city's live music scene. They were joined in the ensuing months by a succession of musicians before settling on what would be known as the classic line-up.

That formation coalesced into Nick on synthesizer and John on bass as well as two more Taylors (no relation), Andy (guitarist) and Roger (drums), plus Simon Le Bon (singer and lyricist). Brothers Paul and Michael Berrow, the well-connected owners of the Rum Runner agreed to manage the band, landing them a support slot on Hazel O'Connor's tour and securing them a deal with EMI Records, who put Duran straight into the studio. Producer Colin Thurston was the man tasked with honing their eclectic influences into a cohesive sound.

DURAN'S DEBUT ALBUM BRISTLES WITH A CREATIVE SYNERGY, A STANDARD THAT BELIED THEIR ROOKIE STATUS

Released in June 1981, just six months after they signed to EMI, Duran Duran's eponymous debut album bristles with a creative synergy – its seamless blend of tight beats, danceable grooves and swirling synths reaching a standard that belied their rookie status.

From the galloping lead single and Top 20 hit *Planet Earth* to the groove of *Friends Of Mine* and yearning *Anyone Out There*, the record barely falters. *Careless Memories* deserved much better than its UK No.37 peak, though its lowly chart position perhaps reflects the fact that record buyers sensed the debut single hadn't been a fluke and bought the album instead – helping it to No.3 (the US didn't embrace the album until it was repackaged post-*Rio*).

Duran Duran's third and final single, *Girls On Film*, a glossy exploration of the fashion world, proved a game-changer, giving the band a No.5 hit, thanks in part to its controversial video – a lesson in savvy marketing that would prove invaluable.

DURAN DURAN
Released 1981
Label EMI
Chart Positions
UK No.3 US No.10

Though the band had been regarded as one of the leading lights of the New Romantic scene – *Planet Earth* notably namechecked the movement early on – Duran had global stardom and longevity in their sights. And sensing that New Romanticism was a trend that would soon pass, they were keen to distance themselves from it. Building on the foundation laid by their debut album, the band were determined to maintain momentum, juggling a hectic touring schedule with writing sessions for a follow-up. Aiming to further the potential of one of the decade's most promising acts so far, EMI doubled the budget to ensure the second album outshone its predecessor.

For the early gestation of *Rio*, the group retreated to the Rum Runner, convened in EMI's basement studios in London and took a brief detour to a French château to write the album, so that by the time they got to George Martin's AIR Studios at the beginning of 1982, the songs were ready to record. With producer Colin Thurston at the helm once again, the sessions ran smoothly and, in a matter of weeks, the group had cultivated a future classic.

Sharing a sonic identity with the debut LP, *Rio* uses that record as a template and builds on it – the melodies are stronger, the music punchier and the hooks catchier, resulting in a masterclass of pop precision. By sticking largely to basic instrumentation – albeit embellished by Nick Rhodes' keyboard wizardry and the odd sax solo – *Rio*, although a defining record of the 80s, still sounds timeless today.

SHARING A SONIC IDENTITY WITH THE DEBUT, THE MELODIES ARE STRONGER, THE MUSIC PUNCHIER AND THE HOOKS CATCHIER

Although it houses three of their strongest singles in the confident swagger of *Hungry Like The Wolf*, the exotically transporting *Save A Prayer* and its frenetic title track, *Rio* has plenty more to offer, most notably the anthemic *Hold Back The Rain* and atmospheric closer *The Chauffeur*, the latter one of the band's finest moments.

Given the album's impact and legacy, *Rio* will forever be seen as a pop culture landmark associated with its string of MTV-monopolising music videos and stunning Patrick Nagel portrait art – elevated by impeccable sleeve design from Matthew Garrett, too – as much as it is an album.

Disregarding all of that, though, and taking the music on its own merit, *Rio* affirmed that Duran Duran were a band with an abundance of substance as well as style.

RIO
Released 1982
Label EMI
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.6

By 1983, Duran Duran were inescapable. *Rio* had been a global phenomenon that elicited mania not seen since The Beatles wherever they went, with fans clamouring to see the teen heartthrobs that dominated the covers of *Smash Hits*, *Number One* and *Look-In*. Standalone single *Is There Something I Should Know?* had given them their first No.1 and though it appeared that the boys had the world at their feet, the glossy veneer hid darkness and despair.

THOUGH IT APPEARED THE BOYS HAD THE WORLD AT THEIR FEET, THE GLOSSY VENEER HID DARKNESS AND DESPAIR

Seven And The Ragged Tiger, (the group and their two managers are the 'seven', the 'ragged tiger' referenced is fame) was an album made to sustain momentum rather than any kind of artistic pull, and it showed. Having worked non-stop for two years, Duran were facing burnout and, on the advice of their management, had agreed to spend a year abroad as tax exiles to record their third album, adding homesickness to the mix.

Short on ideas, with a new producer and experimenting with cutting-edge tech to give them a more dance-oriented sound, the album sessions in France, Australia and the Caribbean were fraught with tension. While their first two LPs had sparked with confidence and vigour, the material on the third was laboured and unoriginal with its singles streets ahead of everything else. Bowie had always been cited as an influence and it was never more evident than on the *China Girl* cosplay of *New Moon On Monday* or the *Let's Dance*-aping *Union Of The Snake*. As those two borrowed so heavily from Nile Rodgers' sound, it seemed only logical to ask him to remix *The Reflex* for its release as a single. It topped the charts both in the UK and the US, reinvigorating sales of the parent album.

Despite its lukewarm critical reception, the LP became Duran's sole No.1 studio album in the UK (*Rio* had stalled at No.2 behind Madness' singles collection). Duran Duran may have achieved success beyond their wildest dreams but unfortunately for them the titular ragged tiger had all but consumed them.

SEVEN AND THE RAGGED TIGER
Released 1983
Label EMI
Chart Positions
UK No.1 US No.8

A gruelling world tour had taken its toll on Duran Duran, prompting them to split for side projects Arcadia and The Power Station before the planned reunion in 1986 commenced minus two Taylors. Roger left the music industry completely and Andy exited the group after a few sessions to work on a solo career, leaving Simon, Nick and John to continue as a trio with contributions from Warren Cuccurullo and Steve Ferrone. Following the success of *The Reflex* and *Wild Boys*, Nile Rodgers was enlisted to co-produce the record.

The result is a sorely underrated collection of soulful, funk-filled jams such as the title track, second single *Skin Trade* (a bona fide Duran classic with one of Le Bon's best vocal performances) and *Proposition*. Tender ballads *A Matter Of Feeling* and the gorgeous *American Science* with its sensual synths and stabs of brass provide texture while the moody atmospherics of *Winter Marches On* complete what is a focused and incredibly well produced collection.

Whether it was the confusing discourse of what was happening in the world of Duran Duran, the underwhelming previous album or the changing tastes within the music scene at the time, *Notorious'* disappointing commercial performance is no reflection of the quality of its content. It's well worth revisiting.

NOTORIOUS
Released 1986
Label EMI
Chart Positions
UK No.16 US No.12

As the 80s ended, Duran Duran brought their first chapter to a close with the aptly titled *Decade* in 1989, a compilation of their singles to date. The collection, along with the fact that the band's records were selling in far fewer quantities than previously, prompted speculation that Duran were about to split but instead they revealed they were working on their sixth studio album with producer Chris Kimsey.

The resulting record surfaced in August 1990 but illustrated a rapid decline in quality control. Over-produced, dated and directionless with few redeeming features, *Liberty* jumps from the awful *Violence Of Summer (Love's Taking Over)* – a terrible lead single which killed the album before it was even released, to the embarrassingly overblown *First Impression*, *Venice Drowning*, *Read My Lips* and *Hothead*.

Liberty's positive elements arrive with gentle ballad *My Antarctica* and the beautiful *Serious*, one of Duran Duran's strongest singles featuring a riff that Johnny Marr would be proud of, which stands out immeasurably in this tracklist. Retrospectively, the band have expressed their disappointment with how *Liberty* turned out, admitting that they lost focus and confidence during its creation while John Taylor was pretty much checked out as he was experiencing the worst of his drug addiction. An immense disappointment.

LIBERTY
Released 1990
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.8 US No.46

Against all odds, Duran Duran had survived the 80s – almost. Sure, they'd lost a couple of members and a chunk of their fanbase had gravitated toward a-ha, Wet Wet Wet and Bros, but the fact they still existed as a unit at all when their peers Culture Club, Wham! and Frankie Goes To Hollywood had all fallen by the wayside, was nothing short of a miracle. John Taylor later revealed that the latter half of the decade was a tough period for the group and that they were close to calling it a day on numerous occasions.

As well as their mixed fortunes professionally, they had suffered personal losses (including *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* producer Alex Sadkin to whom the album was dedicated) and were by this point managing themselves.

The self-awareness that the band were no longer the golden boys of pop provided them with a sense of liberation and freedom to be more daring in their music.

Co-produced by Jonathan Elias and Daniel Abraham with the band, the first half of *Big Thing*, including singles, *All She Wants Is* and *I Don't Want Your Love*, as well as the title track and *Drug (It's Just A State Of Mind)*, are bold and thrashy continuations of what Duran had done on *Notorious* but lack the warmth of that album. They also misrepresent a large proportion of what *Big Thing* actually is.

AWARENESS THAT THEY WERE NO LONGER THE GOLDEN BOYS OF POP PROVIDED THEM WITH A SENSE OF LIBERATION

Much more successful is the latter half of the record that, interludes aside, forms a suite of sparse ballads such as *Land*, *Palomino* and *The Edge Of America*, which reveal those killer melodies that the band are expert at. Meanwhile *Too Late Marlene* and *Do You Believe In Shame?* hark back to their earlier triumphs.

Aware that the Duran Duran name didn't hold the prestige that it once did, the band launched *Big Thing* with promos credited to the pseudonym The Krush Brothers, a moniker under which they had performed some warm-up live dates before embarking on the Electric Theatre Tour to promote the album.

A smaller scale jaunt of much more intimate venues, the Electric Theatre Tour saw guitarist Warren Cuccurullo and drummer Sterling Campbell enlisted as full-time members of the group having played on the last two studio albums.

BIG THING
Released 1988
Label EMI
Chart Positions
UK No.15 US No.24

Although Duran had consistently released music, the beginning of the 90s proved a tough period for them to navigate with diminishing record sales, line-up changes (Sterling Campbell's departure left them as a four-piece) and an identity crisis over where they fitted into a scene that was increasingly dominated by rave, grunge and hip-hop, none of which was a musical match. Disappointed with their last LP, they faced a crossroads as to what their future held.

With no clear direction, the band holed up in Warren Cuccurullo's home studio Privacy in London with producer John Jones to experiment, placing an emphasis on the art of songwriting with a proviso that the tracks had to stand up to being played by four guys in a room. This back-to-basics approach served them well and signalled a creative rebirth, resulting in some of Duran's strongest work in years.

Although the guys were thrilled with the new material, their label held the album back for a year as they weren't sure there was a demand for a Duran Duran record in 1992. It was a leak of first single *Ordinary World* that instigated the release of *Duran Duran* (aka *The Wedding Album* due to its artwork featuring the band members' parents wedding photos) in January 1993.

PLACING EMPHASIS ON SONGWRITING SIGNALLED A CREATIVE REBIRTH AND SOME OF THEIR BEST WORK IN YEARS

The album represents a huge leap in quality from its predecessor. Wistful ballad *Ordinary World* (about the death of a close friend of Le Bon) and the slinky seduction of *Come Undone* were two worthy inclusions to the group's canon of incredible singles. Elsewhere, the album genre-hops from the MTV-baiting, *Too Much Information*, to the trippy-sensuality of *Love Voodoo*, dancefloor stomp of the club-friendly *Drowning Man*, Prince-inflected *U.M.F* and breezy bossa nova of *Breath After Breath*, a duet with Brazilian artist Milton Nascimento.

The revitalised group was thrilled with the reception of the album and set off on their biggest tour to date, spending the majority of the next 12 months on the road performing to a brand new generation of fans.

DURAN DURAN (AKA THE WEDDING ALBUM)
Released 1993
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.4 US No.7

As Duran languished in a musical no-man's land in 1992 whilst waiting to find out when – or indeed if – *The Wedding Album* was going to be released, the band came up with the idea of recording covers of their favourite songs from artists that had inspired them to potentially use as B-sides for future singles. As their repertoire grew, the idea evolved into a covers album instead.

An ill-conceived endeavour, the much maligned *Thank You* was hammered by critics and undid much of the goodwill that their previous album had brought them.

Taking tracks that were deemed untouchable by many (and in most cases should really have stayed untouched), Duran Duran covered artists including Iggy Pop, Led Zeppelin, Sly & The Family Stone, The Doors, Elvis Costello, Bob Dylan, Public Enemy and The Temptations.

Versions of Melle Mel's *White Lines (Don't Don't Do It)* and Lou Reed's *Perfect Day* were issued as singles. Reed himself proclaimed Duran's was the best cover of his work he'd heard and in the band's defence, a later BBC charity cover of the track was far inferior.

Undoubtedly a misstep after the return to form that was *The Wedding Album*, the vicious criticism proclaiming *Thank You* the worst LP of all-time was rather unjust. Thanks to *Liberty* it's not even Duran Duran's worst album.

THANK YOU
Released 1995
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.12 US No.19

Battle-scarred and weary from the mauling that they'd endured for *Thank You*, the group once again found itself fighting for survival.

John Taylor left the band early in the recording process and Simon Le Bon's severe case of writer's block saw Nick Rhodes step up to contribute lyrics and even vocals on the title track.

Much of the album, it was later revealed, was material that Rhodes had worked on with Warren Cuccurullo for their side project TV Mania.

The eclecticism of *Medazzaland* which was initially jarring in 1997 now sits pretty comfortably in today's genre-fluid musical landscape ranging from Red Hot Chili Peppers-esque punk funk to the *Odelay*-era Beck-inspired *Undergoing Treatment*. Loss is a prominent theme on *Buried In The Sand* (about John's departure), *So Long Suicide* (about the death of Kurt Cobain) and stunning ballad *Michael You've Got A Lot To Answer For* concerns Michael Hutchence, while the fun factor returns on the electro-rock *Electric Barbarella*. Unreleased here in the UK until 2022, the diverse *Medazzaland* is definitely worth a visit.

MEDAZZALAND
Released 1997
Label Capitol
Chart Positions
UK N/A
US No.58

Described by Nick Rhodes as the most difficult time to be in Duran Duran after their *Medazzaland* album wasn't released in the UK, 2000's *Pop Trash* is testament to the band's resilience. With John Taylor gone, Duran were once again down to just a three-piece, now consisting of Nick Rhodes, Simon Le Bon and Warren Cuccurullo, and had lost a vital part of its DNA.

They had also signed to Hollywood Records – a label that had no idea what to do with them – and once again Simon's writer's block saw Nick and Warren reworking more of their TV Mania material.

Like its predecessor, *Pop Trash* featured some highpoints, namely the swirling ballads *Starting To Remember* and the album's only global single *Someone Else Not Me* (UK No.53) but ultimately it suffered from a lack of direction and overblown production masking average songcraft.

Poorly promoted and both a commercial and artistic disappointment, the album spelled the end of their brief tenure at Hollywood Records as well as Cuccurullo's time as a member of Duran Duran.

Big changes were required if the group were to survive.

POP TRASH
Released 2000
Label Hollywood
Chart Positions
UK No.53
US No.135

Following the dark times that had permeated Duran Duran's last few releases, a comeback with an anthemic, uplifting track called *(Reach Up For The) Sunrise*, seemingly Taylor-made for punching the air in a huge arena, was the perfect way to celebrate the reunion of the group's most famous five-piece incarnation.

Given the disastrous returns on the past three albums, it's understandable that the group had to earn their stripes whilst shopping around for a new record deal. Having reunited in 2001 to resolve personal issues, Duran recorded sporadically throughout the next two years, accumulating over 30 songs. With little interest forthcoming from record companies, they embarked on a successful tour to prove themselves still a bankable commodity, littering their setlists with new tracks alongside their classics. The move paid off and they landed a deal with Epic.

The reunion of the 'classic' band line-up for the first time since 1985's Bond theme *A View To A Kill* sparked widespread media interest and laid a solid launchpad for *Astronaut*. Nile Rodgers, Dallas Austin, Don Gilmore and Mark Tinley shared production duties over the album's 12 tracks.

Learning from the mistakes of their past few releases, *Astronaut* makes the most of their superb rhythm section, returning to an updated version of Duran's classic formula. Crisp, danceable beats, swooshes of synths with anthemic choruses eradicate the clunky experimentalism of previous efforts. The aforementioned *(Reach Up For The) Sunrise* was the perfect addition to their Essentials playlist as was second single *What Happens Tomorrow* on which Le Bon's vocal evokes Liam Gallagher at times.

ASTRONAUT MAKES THE MOST OF THAT IMPECCABLE RHYTHM SECTION, RETURNING TO A CLASSIC FORMULA

Elsewhere, the laidback *Finest Hour* is a delight that comes replete with William Orbit-esque bubbling synths while *Nice*, *Taste The Summer* and *Want You More!* attempt to replicate the pace of the *Rio* era.

Riding high on a wave of goodwill, the LP peaked at UK No.3, their highest position since *Seven And The Ragged Tiger*, despite mixed reviews. The Fab Five were back. The question was, for how long?

ASTRONAUT
Released 2004
Label Epic
Chart Positions
UK No.3 US No.17

As evidenced on some of Duran Duran's more experimental moments, relying on technology and over-production can sometimes translate into prioritising sounding current over sounding at your best – and this is where the main problem lies with *Paper Gods*.

While *All You Need Is Now* struck the right balance of sounding current with references to their past glories but with fine songwriting to the fore, *Paper Gods*' potential is blighted by outdated Eurodance such as *Dancephobia* and *Change The Skyline*, which don't seem to have a connection with what makes a great Duran Duran song.

Fortunately, there are some good moments, too – maybe its predecessor had raised expectations too high?

The quirky *Sunset Garage* is almost modern Motown, the industrial *You Kill Me With Silence* evokes *Ultra*-era Depeche Mode before erupting into a chorus that is quintessential Duran Duran and *Face For Today* gives a nod to *The Reflex*. The highlight, however, is the delightful *Pressure Off*, on which producer Mr Hudson unites Mark Ronson, Nile Rodgers and Janelle Monáe to create a funky floorfiller to rival Daft Punk's *Get Lucky* with which it shares its musical DNA.

Special mention must also go to the album artwork which collects together iconic symbols of the band's career to date.

PAPER GODS
Released 2015
Label Warner Bros
Chart Positions
UK No.5 US No.10

New album, new line-up was by now a regular occurrence within the Duran Duran camp. Having recorded and scrapped an entire record's worth of original material called *Reportage* in favour of a fresh direction, the band's decision cost them guitarist Andy Taylor who disagreed with it and left the band once again.

Working with producers Timbaland and Nate 'Danja' Hills, the group's 12th studio album divided fans who weren't taken with the tough, sparse sound that the new producers were famous for.

Perhaps the group's most misunderstood musical statement, *Red Carpet Massacre* is a slick and polished collection. The Justin Timberlake-featuring *Nite-Runner*, for example, is a stylistic successor to *Wild Boys*, while the throbbing sensuality of *Skin Divers* is a hook-laden gem. *Zoom In's* New Wave melody is modernised with futuristic beats and bleeps while *She's Too Much* and *Box Full O' Honey* are two of Duran's finest ballads.

Outside of the fact that the band can occasionally sound like the featured artists on their own album, *Red Carpet Massacre* is a case of experimentation done right.

RED CARPET MASSACRE
Released 2007
Label Epic
Chart Positions
UK No.44
US No.36

One of the benefits of a three-decade career is a generation that grew up on your music are now big hitters in the industry and jump at the chance to work with you, bringing with them an encyclopedic knowledge and new perspective to where your strengths lay. Such was the case with the choice of Mark Ronson as producer for *All You Need Is Now*.

A self-confessed superfan, Ronson's premise of "Return to *Rio*" proved much more than hyperbole and helped Duran produce their best album since their magnum opus.

From the meaty drum patterns, muscular basslines and prominent synths, the album contains enough sonic references to *Rio* to recapture the vitality of that album while still sounding completely contemporary here.

The majestic *The Man Who Stole A Leopard* (featuring Kelis), New Wave disco of *Safe (In The Heat Of The Moment)* (featuring Scissor Sister Ana Matronic) and anthemic *Girl Panic!* are just a few standouts from an album where the high standard rarely dips.

It was the comeback that Duran Duran had always promised but few were convinced they were capable of. A complete triumph.

ALL YOU NEED IS NOW
Released 2010
Label Epic
Chart Positions
UK No.11
US No.29

If ever a title defined a band, it is *Future Past* for Duran Duran, a group that has strived to move forward while being constantly reminded of, and defined by, their history. In four decades, they have weathered whatever has been thrown at them – be it addiction, various line-up changes, label moves or falling out of fashion. They've ploughed on, brushing off their failures and been unafraid to try new things and – regardless of the results sometimes – for that they must be commended. It is remarkable that a band 40 years on from their debut album are still challenging themselves and making music of such a high calibre as *Future Past*.

IT IS REMARKABLE THAT A BAND 40 YEARS ON ARE STILL MAKING MUSIC OF SUCH A HIGH CALIBRE AS *FUTURE PAST*

Released in 2021, their 15th studio album saw them team up with Erol Alkan, Mark Ronson, Giorgio Moroder and Blur's Graham Coxon for an incredibly strong set. An eclectic mix which includes standouts such as the futuristic ballads of the title track and *Wing*, the haunting *Nothing Less* and carefree groove of *All Of You*. The sublime Moroder magic of *Beautiful Lies* and *Tonight United* soar, while deluxe edition track *Laughing Boy* evokes Bowie's *Ashes To Ashes* and *Invisible* summons *1999*-era Prince.

Sonics aside, the lyrical themes of emotional crises, intimacy and isolation took on extra resonance in a post-lockdown world. The record was warmly received by critics and peaked at No.3 in the UK, earning them the distinction of having scored a Top 5 album in five consecutive decades.

Benefiting from its release and coinciding with the 40th anniversary of *Rio* and their induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, *Future Past* was regarded as a well-deserved victory lap. During the RHOF ceremony, a letter from Andy Taylor read by Simon Le Bon explained that his absence was due to him battling pancreatic cancer. Putting the past behind them, Duran's future includes Andy who is currently working with the group on a new project, restoring the original Fab Five once again.

FUTURE PAST
Released 2021
Label BMG/Tape Modern
Chart Positions
UK No.3 US No.28

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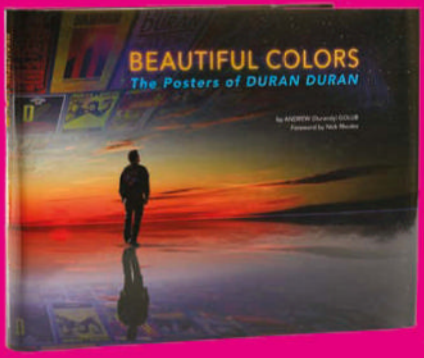


PURPLE REIGN

FROM CO-FOUNDING DURAN DURAN TO SOLO SUCCESS AND A SURPRISE REINVENTION AS A FOLK TROUBADOUR, IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT IT'S BEEN QUITE A RIDE FOR THE ARTIST FORMERLY KNOWN AS STEPHEN 'TIN TIN' DUFFY. *CLASSIC POP* MEETS THE MUSICAL CHAMELEON AS HE UNVEILS HIS BAND THE LILAC TIME'S LATEST ALBUM…

STEVE O'BRIEN

For a man who co-founded Duran Duran and was responsible for one of the 80s most infectious floorfillers, the No.4-charting *Kiss Me*, Stephen Duffy was never keen on the mainstream pop of the time. "I wasn't that comfortable with the synthesizers and drum machines," he tells *Classic Pop* over Zoom from his home in Falmouth. "I was having a hard time with it."

With that in mind, in 1986 the man the world knew as Stephen 'Tin Tin' Duffy put his solo career on hold for a band project that would eventually see him dropped by his record label, Virgin.

"I played them half the album and they didn't even want to hear the rest," he laughs. "They wanted me to carry on making dance records, and why not? But I just felt like it was time to get back to the acoustic guitar, which was where I started, and do the absolute opposite of everything that was going on."

Before The Lilac Time (the name is from the Nick Drake track *River Man* – "Going to see the river man/ Going to tell him all I can/ About the plan/ For lilac time"), there was little in Duffy's musical oeuvre that suggested he was a frustrated folkie. There was Duran, of course, which he co-formed at Birmingham Polytechnic in 1978 with Nick Rhodes and John Taylor (Stephen left after just a year), and the band Tin Tin, which later gave the singer his solo moniker. Then there was his album of experimental house (*Designer Beatnik* by Dr Calculus mdma) and those synth-drenched solo singles – *Kiss Me*, *Icing On The Cake*, *Unkiss That Kiss*… That Stephen Duffy of all people would go folk seemed as likely as Twisted Sister putting out a shoegazing album.

But folk music had always been part of Duffy's life. "The first group I ever saw, when I was nine, was The Incredible String Band," he says, "and before punk I'd played in folk clubs with my brother Nick. It was really after the Dr Calculus thing that I thought, 'I've got to get back to writing songs on the guitar.' I'd done a little bit on the *Because We Love You* album, but it was time to completely dedicate myself to that."

Quite a gear shift then for an artist whose biggest single had epitomised the sound of 1985.

The early days of The Lilac Time, named from a Nick Drake lyric

"I was told back then, 'You're never going to be forgiven for *Kiss Me*, whatever you do.' So that was part of why I thought, well, I'll be The Lilac Time now, to draw a line underneath that."

Fast forward nearly four decades and The Lilac Time are still with us (in your face, Virgin!), albeit a few members down from that 1986 line-up, and about to release their 11th long-player, *Dance Till All The Stars Come Down*. It's a remarkable record – tender, lush and whisperingly intimate. At the age of 63 and 38 years on from his debut solo LP, Stephen Duffy may have produced his masterwork.

"I think it's our best album," he states proudly. "I really feel that. I approached the songs on this thinking, let's make them all as if it's not only the last song I'm going to write, but the last song anybody's gonna write. So each one had to sum something up, everything had to resolve, there had to be a point to it all. I think it's the most complete bunch of songs I've ever written."

For all its sonic warmth, however, there's a sharp lyrical bite to many of the record's tracks. Lead single *A Makeshift Raft* was the first song written for the album and was inspired by the photo of the body of two-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in September 2015. "We fight a war we say no more," Duffy sings, "Then we go on as before/ Will they hate forever more?"

"That children fleeing chemical warfare are being demonised and drowned, and that such tragedy is being used to exacerbate racism to serve as a distraction to and garner support for a morally and politically bankrupt Conservative party is the tragedy we are living through," he says angrily.

There's similar Tory-bashing on second 45 *The Long Way* which asks, "Who votes to be homeless/ To be unemployed/ Who votes for kindness/ To be destroyed/ They offer just hatred/ Or suicide". The song, Stephen insists, is a "rebuke to Conservative voters."

"I grew up in the 60s and 70s and thought we were on a beautiful trajectory away from stupidity," Stephen explains. "Regardless of how abhorrent and shameful the Thatcher years were, I believed that virtue and righteousness would prevail. And however unlawful and hateful the current Conservative government is, it is crucial we still believe."

© Cats In The Yard Photography

Stephen Duffy: From Duran Duran to synth explorer to house producer – and now country and folk

Fans can find Duffy's Top 100 tunes on Spotify via The Lilac Time's Facebook page

© Cats In The Yard Photography

The Lilac Time on stage at Cornwall's 2015 Port Eliot Festival

"I HAD A DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH TOURING. I SAW IT MORE AS AN EXTENSION OF MY SOCIAL LIFE. I NEVER SAW IT AS WORK."

Family Time: (Left-Right) Duffy brothers Nick and Stephen, and Claire Duffy

REUNION OF THE SNAKE?

Six years ago *Classic Pop* asked Stephen Duffy if he'd ever considered reteaming with his old Duran bandmates, to which he replied: "The 40th anniversary is coming up in 2018, so I'm keeping the year free, because obviously it's what everyone's waiting for!"

Nothing did happen in 2018, but has there ever been talk of some kind of reunion?

"No," he laughs, "but it would be amusing. I mean, they would lose their fans so quickly. People often say, 'Do you regret leaving Duran Duran?' thinking that the regret would be that I didn't share in their success and their wealth. But it was kind of a weird thing that we were doing and it would have been good to have done another year of that, to see where that went."

The closest Duffy's got to a reunion was the 1999 album *Dark Circles* that he recorded with Nick Rhodes, which was basically re-recordings of that first incarnation of Duran Duran's weirder material. John Taylor, however, was missing and, Stephen says, the three of them haven't been in the same room together for 40 years.

"It was 1983 at the Danceteria in New York," he says. "I was doing a performance for *Kiss Me*. As I arrived, there was John and Nick. That was a bit bizarre. I've seen them separately since, but that was the last time the three of us were all together."

So, is there any chance of a full reunion of that 1979 iteration of Duran Duran?

"I did suggest to Nick that we – Nick, John and I – should do a tour of towns which have Winter Gardens. John would be the only person with a licence so he'd have to drive us around. And he warmed to the idea. But I don't know how they'd fit that in with their kind of arena lifestyle."

© Cats In The Yard Photography

Duffy says he's always seen The Lilac Time as a political band but, generally speaking, *Dance Till All The Stars Come Down* is a less charged record than 2019's *Return To Us*. Here, there are songs about the Californian wildfires, Allen Ginsberg and the joys – and occasional miseries – of touring (in LP closer *The Band That Nobody Knew*).

"It's about us and every band," he says. "I had a dysfunctional relationship with touring. I saw it more as an extension of my social life, or just a more out and about version of my life. I never saw it as work and as many will attest didn't really see myself as an entertainer. I would only want to sing the songs that I was enthusiastic about, which were mainly the new ones. We tried to do one of those 'band plays the album all the way through' things at the Port Eliot festival a few years ago. We chose the first eponymous [*The Lilac Time*] one, but I had to bail on the concept as it began to depress me and the idea just felt so constricting. I can't imagine how bands tour their old songs night after night."

The Lilac Time currently comprises Duffy, plus brother Nick, and wife Claire, who joined in 1999 after the band regrouped after an eight-year hiatus. Nick has been at Stephen's side through most of his musical life and it's clear that, unlike many other rock and pop families, from the Wilsons to the Finns to the Davies', there's an unshakeable bond there that has prevented them from ever suffering an Oasis-style flare-up.

"We started in the same place," Stephen says. "The Incredible String Band, T. Rex... Then, after looking at our parents and relatives being so miserable going to work, we decided, we're not going to work. And we both went to the same art college four years apart." He pauses and smiles. "But he didn't start Duran Duran!"

So what keeps the relationship harmonious? Duffy says that, beyond their familial closeness, it's because he allows his brother complete freedom within the band (on this record, Nick plays the banjo and accordion).

"I write most of the songs obviously, but there's usually an instrumental or two, and I let him do whatever he wants," the singer says. "If he wasn't here, it would probably be a solo record."

One Lilac Time project that Duffy has been undertaking on his own is the long-gestating (and by long-gestating, we *mean* long-gestating) book that promises, according to the website lilactimebook.com, "previously unpublished photographs, notebooks, memorabilia, and ephemera in *The Lilac Times*: the story of a very English band of folk devils."

"I've been writing it since 1978," he tells us, suggesting the book will cover Duffy's life and career before and after the inception of The Lilac Time. "But it is actually happening now. I've almost got to the bit where we split up." He holds up a bunch of Winnie the Pooh-covered notebooks. "It's mainly about the songs and the experience of writing and recording them. But then everybody else is wading in with their incredibly misguided interpretations of what I was up to. The wonderful thing is, [original] drummer Michael Giri's take on it is so unlike the other members of the band, that it's like a completely different story. So it's a lot more interesting than I thought it was going to be. But the trouble with things being a lot more interesting is they take a lot more time because if it was boring, you'd kind of get rid of it as quickly as possible."

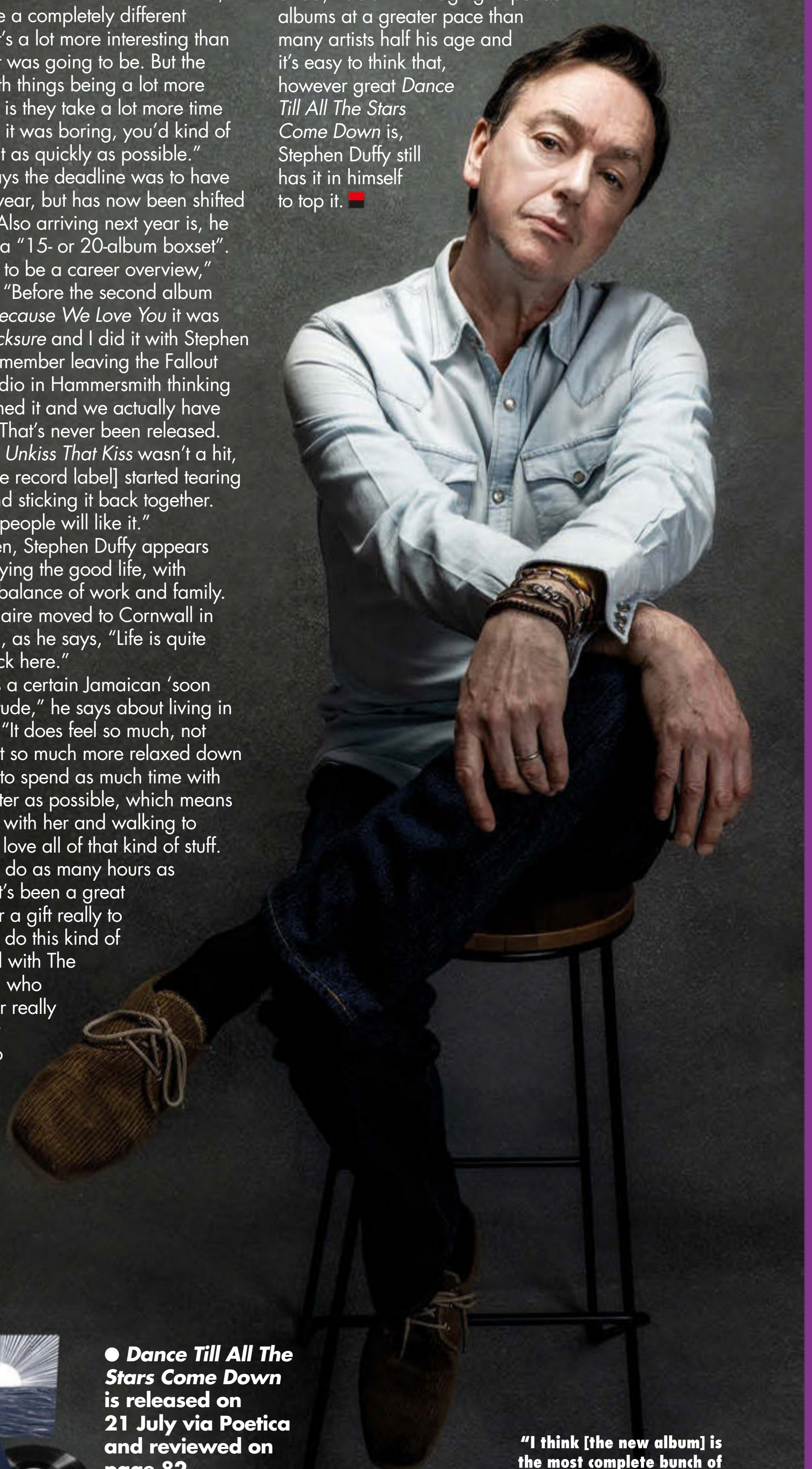
Duffy says the deadline was to have been this year, but has now been shifted to 2024. Also arriving next year is, he promises, a "15- or 20-album boxset". "It's going to be a career overview," he teases. "Before the second album became *Because We Love You* it was called *Cocksure* and I did it with Stephen Street. I remember leaving the Fallout Shelter studio in Hammersmith thinking we'd finished it and we actually have that tape. That's never been released. Obviously *Unkiss That Kiss* wasn't a hit, so they [the record label] started tearing it apart and sticking it back together. Hopefully people will like it."

Until then, Stephen Duffy appears to be enjoying the good life, with a healthy balance of work and family. He and Claire moved to Cornwall in 2007 and, as he says, "Life is quite kicked back here."

"There's a certain Jamaican 'soon come' attitude," he says about living in Falmouth. "It does feel so much, not slower, but so much more relaxed down here. I try to spend as much time with my daughter as possible, which means getting up with her and walking to school… I love all of that kind of stuff. I just try to do as many hours as possible. It's been a great blessing or a gift really to be able to do this kind of work. And with The Lilac Time, who have never really sold many records, to be able to continue doing this work, it's like a vocation."

Life may be quieter for Stephen Duffy now from the time in the mid-90s when he was living in a rented flat in Camden at the centre of the Britpop happening, to co-writing Robbie Williams' 2005 album *Intensive Care* in Los Angeles, but there's still fire in his belly. At the age of 63, he's still managing to put out albums at a greater pace than many artists half his age and it's easy to think that, however great *Dance Till All The Stars Come Down* is, Stephen Duffy still has it in himself to top it.

● ***Dance Till All The Stars Come Down* is released on 21 July via Poetica and reviewed on page 82**



"I think [the new album] is the most complete bunch of songs I've ever written," says Stephen Duffy

CLASSIC POP TOP TEN

WEEK ENDING 7 JULY 1990

A WEEK CHOCK FULL OF DIVERSE CLASSICS FROM ELTON AND OPERA THROUGH TO MOTIVATIONAL POWER BALLADRY, EURODANCE – AND HAMMER TIME!

STEVE O'BRIEN

01 (1) **ELTON JOHN SACRIFICE/HEALING HANDS** (ROCKET)

02 (2) **LUCIANO PAVAROTTI NESSUN DORMA** (DECCA)

SACRIFICE/HEALING HANDS
ELTON JOHN (ROCKET)

Can you believe that, despite his megawatt fame and how long he'd been in the pop game, that this double A-side was Reg Dwight's first solo No.1 single in his homeland. Spun from his 22nd album, 1989's *Sleeping With The Past*, *Sacrifice* was first released as a single in '89 but initially stalled at No.55 in the UK and at No.18 in the US. Then, in mid-1990, Steve Wright playlisted the song on his Radio 1 show, which prompted MCA to re-release the track, this time paired with another Elton-Bernie Taupin co-write, *Healing Hands*. In the book *1000 UK Number One Hits*, lyricist Taupin described the latter song as "an updated version of The Four Tops' *Reach Out I'll Be There*, only slightly more religious."

MONA
CRAIG McLACHLAN AND CHECK 1-2 (EPIC)

Of all the pop stars that *Neighbours* produced, Craig McLachlan is the one that seems most forgotten. Okay, so his music career didn't quite match the stellar highs of his co-stars Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan, but at the time Craig McLachlan was quite the hunkthrob. This cover of a vintage Bo Diddley B-side would be his highest charting UK single and came about almost by accident. According to Craig, he and his band Check 1-2 had been messing around playing *New York Groove* by former KISS guitarist Ace Frehley. "[Producer] Garth [Porter] heard it in the control room and goes, 'Oh, great, the boys are playing Bo Diddley, how cool. Let's roll tape on a bit of that,'" he told the *Herald Sun*. "Then he calls us into the control room and says, 'Let's whack some vocals down, and do a cover of *Mona*.' And I'm like, 'What are you talking about? We were playing Ace Frehley!'"

NESSUN DORMA
LUCIANO PAVAROTTI (DECCA)

It's weird to think now that, for a few months in the middle of 1990, the UK became incredibly highbrow. Or at least, that's what it looked like, judging from the amount of people who were buying – and occasionally attempting to sing – this rousing aria from Puccini's *Turandot*. Except it wasn't that Joe and Jane Brit had suddenly discovered the joys of Italian opera, but that they were caught up in a wave of football fever, due to Luciano Pavarotti's rendition of the tenor aria having been chosen as the BBC's theme to their 1990 World Cup TV coverage. (He'd also sing it live during the first Three Tenors concert on the eve of the Final in Rome). Altogether now: "Nella tua fredda stanza/ Guardi le stelle che tremano/ D'amore e di speranza!"

IT MUST HAVE BEEN LOVE
ROXETTE (EMI)

Imagine if *White Christmas* had been a flop before being re-released with all references to the festive season scrubbed out? Well, that's kind of what happened with Roxette's *It Must Have Been Love (Christmas For The Broken Hearted)*, which, after being released in the band's native Sweden in 1987, was then re-recorded as an all-year-round power ballad, hitting No.3 in the UK (and No.1 in the United States) off the back of its use in the Julia Roberts rom com, *Pretty Woman*. "Nobody expected the movie to become such a smash and for us it was, of course, a jackpot," Per Gessle told *Songwriter Universe* in 2018.

	03	(3) **ROXETTE** **IT MUST HAVE BEEN LOVE** (EMI)
▲	04	(7) **CRAIG McLACHLAN AND CHECK 1-2** **MONA** (EPIC)
	05	(5) **SNAP** **OOOPS UP** (ARISTA)
▼	06	(4) **ENGLANDNEWORDER** **WORLD IN MOTION** (FACTORY/MCA)
▲	07	(8) **MAXI PRIEST** **CLOSE TO YOU** (10)
▼	08	(6) **WILSON PHILLIPS** **HOLD ON** (SBK)
▲	09	(13) **MC HAMMER** **U CAN'T TOUCH THIS** (CAPITOL)
▲	10	(11) **MC TUNES VS 808 STATE** **THE ONLY RHYME THAT BITES** (ZTT)

OOOPS UP
SNAP!
(ARISTA)

Though it didn't quite hit the highs of the chart-conquering *The Power*, *Ooops Up* was still one of the most insidious earworms of 1990. The song is actually a reworking of *I Don't Believe You Want to Get Up And Dance (Oops!)*, a 1980 Top 10 hit by The Gap Band (in which Snap's Penny Ford had been a backing singer). "It was more or less them picking me up by the scruff of my neck like a pitbull and throwing me in the booth with a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of Champagne and turning the mike on," Ford told *SongFacts*. "I just sang the first thing that came off the top of my head, because I didn't understand that music, and didn't think I'd ever have to hear it again."

CLOSE TO YOU
MAXI PRIEST
(10)

The second and – to date – last of Maxi Priest's Top 10 hits, *Close To You* was released as the lead 7" from the singer's fourth album *Bonafide*. While it only peaked at No.7 in his home country it hit the top spot in the US, his only chart-topper there. The song came about when Priest was driving in his Jeep on a sunny day when he suddenly started singing "I just wanna be close to you…" "When I got to the studio they were working on something else, and I came in with this vibe," he told *SongFacts*. "I was just singing and [co-writer] Gary Benson asked me, 'Where did you get that from? Where did that come from? I like it!' and immediately we began working."

U CAN'T TOUCH THIS
MC HAMMER
(CAPITOL)

Winner of the Grammy Award for Best R&B Song and Best Rap Solo Performance and winner of the MTV Video Music Award for Best Rap Video, it's fair to say that *U Can't Touch This* was something of a phenomenon in the summer of 1990 and remains the man born Stanley Kirk Burrell's signature song. Forget the Aladdin-style pants, this Rick James-sampling banger is a pop-rap classic.

THE ONLY RHYME THAT BITES
MC TUNES VS 808 STATE **(ZTT)**

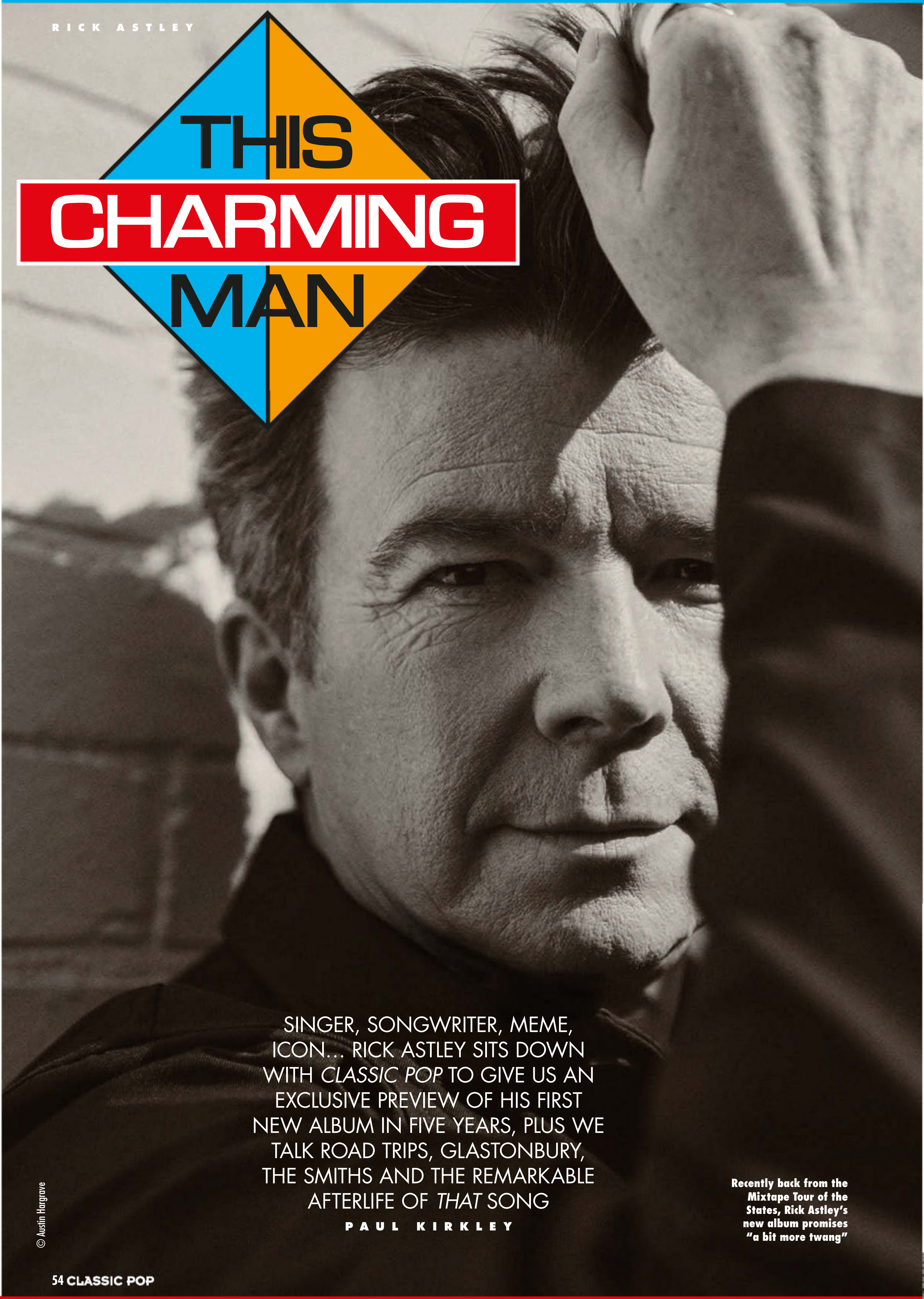
Few hip-hop artists rapped faster and meaner than MC Tunes who teamed up with 808 State for this club classic. They'd follow it up with another collaboration, the UK No.18-charting *Tunes Splits The Atom*, but this is the real floor-filler.

WORLD IN MOTION... ENGLAND NEWORDER
(FACTORY/MCA)

The idea of New Order performing the official England World Cup song sounded as crazy as The Fall being chosen as the UK's entry in the Eurovision Song Contest, but, yes, in summer 1990, it actually happened – the band that gave us *Blue Monday*, *Ceremony* and *State Of The Nation* went into the studio with the England team and came up with this, the first – and perhaps only – genuinely cool football song. Musically, it borrowed heavily from the theme to BBC2's 'yoof' current affairs show *Reportage* (composed by Stephen Morris and Gillian Gilbert), while the lyrics were penned by Bernard Sumner with comedian, actor and Groucho Club mischief-maker Keith Allen. Respect to John Barnes for his one-take rap amid the boozy chaos of the rest of his team.

HOLD ON
WILSON PHILLIPS
(SBK)

When Carnie Wilson, Chynna Phillips and Wendy Wilson turned up at the end of the 2011 comedy film *Bridesmaids* as the wedding band for the marriage of Wilson Phillips superfan Lillian Donovan there was really only one song they were likely to play. "Here with us tonight," says Rose Byrne's wedding planner, "is Lillian's favourite band singing her favourite song," before the trio burst into *Hold On*, their debut single and biggest hit. Despite being a feelgood favourite, Chynna Phillips admitted that she wrote the track while battling substance abuse and that the lyrics are inspired by the principles taught in Alcoholics Anonymous, specifically the idea that things had to be taken "one day at a time."



THIS CHARMING MAN

SINGER, SONGWRITER, MEME, ICON… RICK ASTLEY SITS DOWN WITH *CLASSIC POP* TO GIVE US AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW OF HIS FIRST NEW ALBUM IN FIVE YEARS, PLUS WE TALK ROAD TRIPS, GLASTONBURY, THE SMITHS AND THE REMARKABLE AFTERLIFE OF *THAT* SONG

PAUL KIRKLEY

Recently back from the Mixtape Tour of the States, Rick Astley's new album promises "a bit more twang"

© Austin Hargrave

The year is 1987, and Britain's pop crown rests firmly atop the gravity-defying quiff of a young singer from the north-west of England. Though exactly *whose* quiff depends on which tribe you belong to: for the misfit indie kids who voted The Smiths best act in the *NME*'s end-of-year poll, Steven Patrick Morrissey is their one true king. But for *Smash Hits* readers – and the wider record-buying public – the glory belongs to a 21-year-old from the market town of Newton-le-Willows, who's come from nowhere to score the biggest-selling single of the year.

What neither side could have predicted, though, was that three-and-a-half decades later, Rick Astley – for it was he – would not only be cooler than Morrissey, he'd also be a cooler frontman of The Smiths (or the next best thing, anyway).

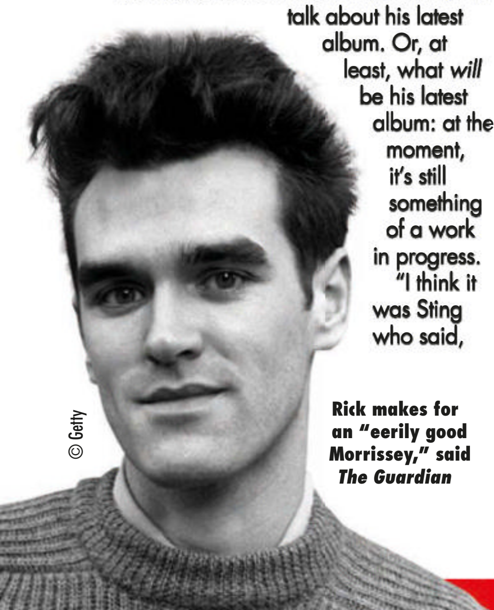
"I struggle with that word, cool," says Rick, with trademark modesty, when *Classic Pop* lobs the compliment his way. "But if it's even a possibility, then it's nice to hear. Because I've never thought of myself as cool. I certainly wasn't cool when I had my hits."

Perhaps not. But in 2023, Rick Astley is an artist with a rare multi-generational reach: a man equally at home reading the *CBeebies Bedtime Story* as he is rocking out at The O2 with his pals the Foo Fighters, having worked his charm offensive on everyone from Gen Zed Tik-Tokkers (where he has three million followers) to Radio 2 playlisters. And while the semi-ironic phenomenon of 'Rickrolling' – that durable internet meme that's helped push YouTube views of his breakthrough hit *Never Gonna Give You Up* over the one billion mark – certainly explains part of that, the affection in which the world holds this most relatable of pop stars is 100% genuine.

For proof, look no further than the joyous response that greeted the singer's latest side hustle, fronting a Smiths tribute show with Stockport indie band Blossoms.

More on that later: first, we've convened in the library of a swish riverside hotel near Rick's home in south-west London to talk about his latest album. Or, at least, what *will* be his latest album: at the moment, it's still something of a work in progress.

"I think it was Sting who said,



© Getty

Rick makes for an "eerily good Morrissey," said *The Guardian*

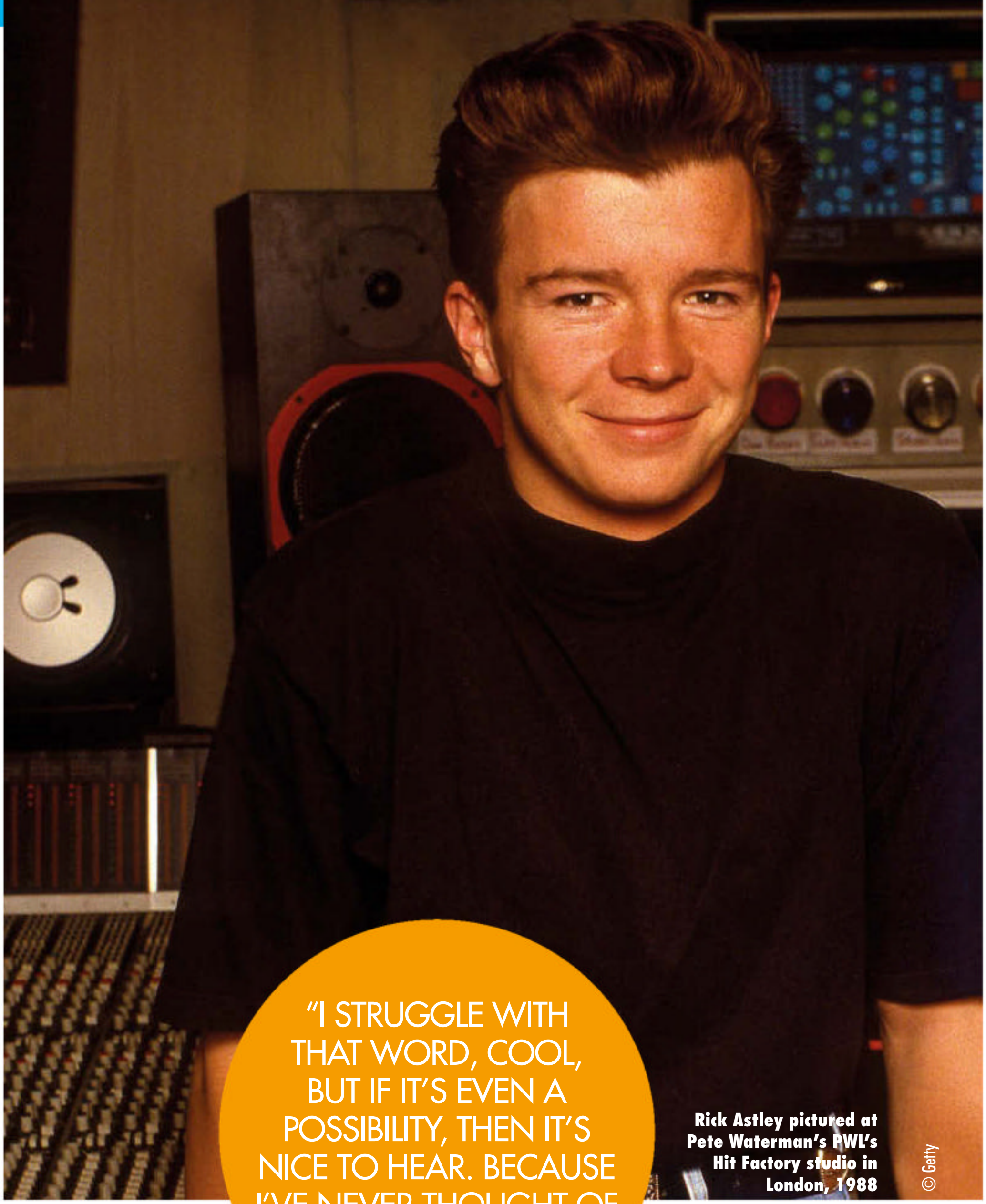
'You never finish a record, you just run out of money'," smiles Rick. "Or the record company goes, 'it's coming out now'. I'm one of those people who could mess around forever. But at some point you've just got to commit and say, 'that's it – it's done.'"

Like his most recent LPs, 2016's chart-topping *50*, and 2018's *Beautiful Life*, the album – working title *Are We There Yet?* – has been mostly recorded at Rick's home studio in East Molesey, with the 57-year-old serving as writer, producer, singer and multi-instrumentalist.

That wasn't necessarily the plan, though. "I did say, this time, that I was going to write a few songs, and see if somebody wants to produce them," he explains. "So I just sort of hammered into it, and then it got to a point where I thought, 'Well, that sounds a bit like a record already...'

"But also, I love it," he grins. "I don't want to sound like an egomaniac, but I kind of love playing it all."

This one-man industry approach is perhaps a little ironic, suggests *CP*, for someone who started his career on the pop production line of Stock Aitken Waterman's Hit Factory – the clue was in



© Getty

Rick Astley pictured at Pete Waterman's PWL's Hit Factory studio in London, 1988

"I STRUGGLE WITH THAT WORD, COOL, BUT IF IT'S EVEN A POSSIBILITY, THEN IT'S NICE TO HEAR. BECAUSE I'VE NEVER THOUGHT OF MYSELF AS COOL."

the name – and endured endless jibes about being the 'studio tea boy' who got lucky. (For the record, he *did* sometimes make the tea, but only as part of a wider musical apprenticeship after Pete Waterman talent-spotted him singing with soul band FBI.)

"I have wondered occasionally, 'Is that part of it?'" admits Rick. "Because those early records were kind of Stock Aitken Waterman records, with me singing on them. So there are times when I think, 'Is that why I keep going into that room and doing it myself – because I want to prove myself? I don't *think* I need to prove it to me any more. But you do wonder."

As a singer, Rick has always had one foot in America, his rich baritone sharing more DNA with early heroes such as Al Green and Bill Withers than local contemporaries like Morrissey. But the new record finds him leaning into even more of a Stateside aesthetic, inspired in part by a mammoth road trip he and wife/manager Lene undertook during last year's Mixtape Tour, on which Astley shared the bill with New Kids On The Block, Salt-N-Pepa and En Vogue.

"We rented our own bus, with our own driver – which was kind of

Touring this summer, Rick Astley's live show came to Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage on 24 June

ridiculous, 'cos it was just the two of us," he laughs. "We did something like 22,000 miles, across these roads that just seem to go on forever.

"I'm not saying this new stuff is Americana," he stresses. "It isn't. It's pop music, and I'm English. But I've probably come home from America a bit revitalised, and thinking: it's okay to have a big fat vibrato guitar sort of thing going on. It's not country, but there's definitely a bit more twang on this record."

The first new song Rick cues up on his phone is *Never Gonna Stop* (and yes, the title *is* a cheeky allusion to *that* song). It's a big, infectious gospel number, complete with handclaps and choir (recorded at Abbey Road – "but only because they were digging up the end of our road") in which his voice, more weathered and lived-in than in his SAW days, sounds more soulful than ever.

"From a vocal point of view, I've always been influenced by – or stolen from – the great American singers," he says. "There's an element of imitation to it. I don't sing like a kid from Newton, and I never have. In my head, I'm trying to do what Bill Withers did. Similarly, when I write a song about walking these streets, I don't mean walking the streets of East Molesey – I'm on an open road in America somewhere."

Golden Hour is a lush, mid-tempo ballad in which Rick sings of walking those very highways in search of "the only thing that sets me free" – love. Having been happily married to Lene, with whom he has a 31-year-old daughter, for decades, affairs of the heart aren't something he's had to wrestle much with lately. "But I'm still really romantic," he says. "And I think it's just a natural thing for me to do. The way I sing, the hardest thing is writing lyrics that aren't just, 'I love you baby...'"

And yet, on *Dipping My Feet*, Rick wiggles a tentative toe in the waters of the protest song. "I've seen those City boys," he sings of the world's bankers, brokers and hedge fund sharks. "They dress and talk the same/ I wouldn't trust them with the pouring rain."

"Listen to me, living my leafy suburban, 80s pop star life, wailing about the injustice of it all," he smiles. "I know I'm incredibly lucky. But I still know what it feels like to come from a small town where your options are limited. And I just find it incredible the way we still treat people on the lowest rungs like shit."

He's not about to deliver his own *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, though. "People would just listen to my voice and go, 'That doesn't sound right'," he says. "We're sort of tarred with a certain brush, and I accept that. What are you gonna do? My first song was *Never Gonna Give You Up*. And that's not belittling me or anything. That's the way the cookie crumbles."

His debut hit – one of just a

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN INFLUENCED BY – OR STOLEN FROM – THE GREAT AMERICAN SINGERS. IN MY HEAD, I'M TRYING TO DO WHAT BILL WITHERS DID."

Rick's trademark 80s classic *Never Gonna Give You Up* currently has 1.4 billion YouTube views

© Peter Neill

handful of 80s songs to have joined YouTube's elite billion views club – is clearly not one he's ever going to escape from: just when its cultural ubiquity appears to be cooling, it pops up in new and surprising places, from the global video game phenomenon *Fortnite* – where his signature 'Astley shuffle' has been turned into an 'emote' (ask your kids) – to an unexpectedly poignant rendition by Hannah Waddingham during a *Ted Lasso* funeral scene.

"We get offers to do something with it probably on a weekly basis," says Astley. "I just shot a commercial in America, where they wanted to recreate the video. I was like, 'Oh fuck, come on...' Anyway, long story short, they offered me a lot of money.

"I do feel very privileged," he adds. "That song is part of my DNA, and I'm lucky to have it. But there's a point where you go 'hang on, I'm not The Smiths. It's just a pop song from the 80s, that I didn't write.' It's not some holy relic. If somebody wants to pay me a load of money to do a commercial, which means I can then go and do something I want to do, then yeah, I'll do it. But there are times where you go, 'So you just want me to come and sing the old song, and don't even want to talk about the fact I've made a new record? Yeah, let's just leave it.'

"I don't want to come across in any way precious, or act like it's difficult. Because I am grateful. I've had a really good life because of Stock Aitken Waterman – not exactly driving Ferraris into pools, but I've never had to worry about the gas bill. Which is ridiculous, considering I was 21 at the time. But it's a weird one. When someone goes, 'Does Rick want to dress up in a raincoat and do the dance?', there's a part of my soul that goes, 'Hell yeah'. And then there's a part of me that goes, 'nah, not today...'"

Never Gonna Give You Up's ability to unite

Astley recently released a remastered edition of his 1988 second album, *Hold Me In Your Arms*

© Austin Hargrave

CHIPS AND GRAVY

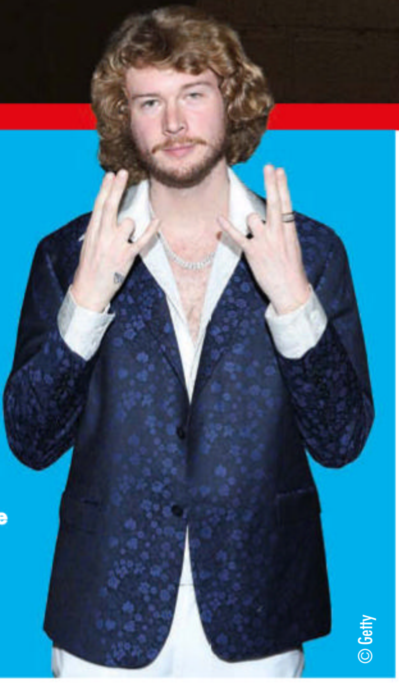
"It's an artificial dream of the future, but we'd better be prepared to kneel," sings Rick on *Never Gonna Go*, a song from his new album in which he contemplates a future driven by artificial intelligence.

For a musician, it's a scenario that hits uncomfortably close to home. "I think everyone in the business is panicking a bit," he says. "Because if you can make anyone sound like anyone, you're not sure who has ownership of something."

Sometimes, the results are harmless – like the recent AI-generated 'Rick Astley' Michael Jackson and Hall & Oates covers. "I can laugh at that, 'cos it's just 'me' singing *Billie Jean*," he says. "But you do wonder if it's opening the floodgates..."

Less amusingly, Rick recently launched a lawsuit against the US rapper Yung Gravy (pictured right) for imitating his voice on his 2022 hit *Betty (Get Money)*. "It's not a sample, it's basically someone who's been engineered to sound as much as possible like me," he explains. "And I just woke up one day and thought, 'Does this mean they can do this to my favourite records? Can someone do this to Al Green?' And I started to get pretty angry about it.

"It's not even a money thing," he insists. "And it's not me just getting on my high horse about my track. It's not even my fight, really. It's the music business' fight. So we'll see what happens."



© Getty

all audiences will no doubt be in full effect when Astley makes his Glastonbury debut this month, playing both a solo set and a Smiths show with Blossoms. "I'm first on – way down the bill," he says, diffident as ever. "But it's the Pyramid Stage. If you'd said that to me back in the day, I'd have said, 'You're joking?' Because… it's not imposter syndrome. It's more about reaching a stage where you can say: This is what I do for a living. And I must be good enough at it, because they keep inviting me back to do it again."

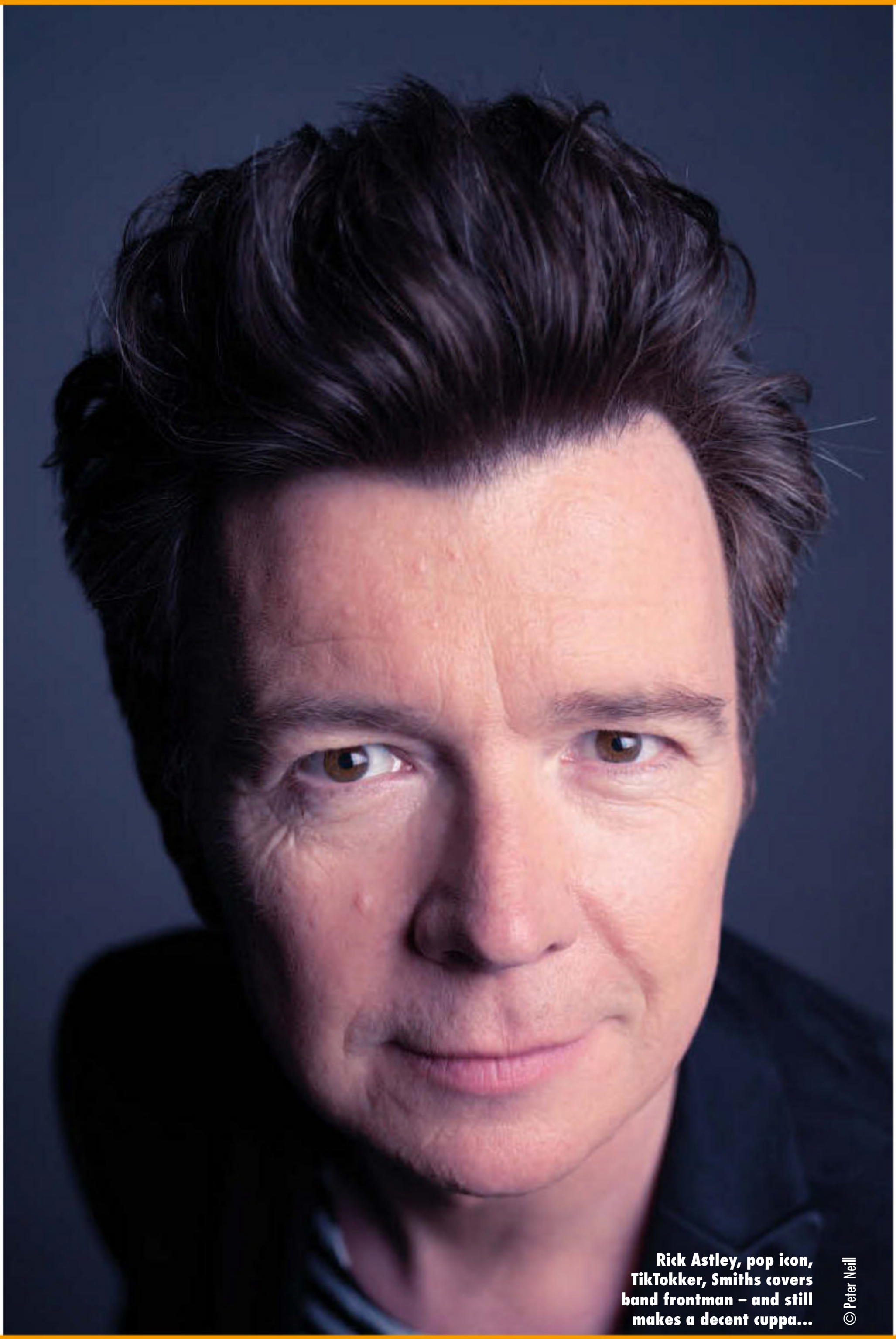
With his boyish good looks and skyscraping quiff undiminished by age – and his affable, easy-going personality seemingly untarnished by fame – it can be easy to forget Rick Astley has been in the game as long as he has. But, as well as being a reference to his 22,000-mile American odyssey, *Are We There Yet?*'s title also alludes to its creator taking stock of his life and career. "It's about the fact that I'm 57," he says. "And there's a part of me that thinks, 'I don't know how many more records I'm going to get to make, or want to make'. So it's a bit like: 'Am I there yet? Where am I, really?'

"I'm really lucky that I still get to do certain things. But as the years clock on, I do think there are other things I'd like to do. I've just spent another year making a record. Which is a privilege, I'm aware of that. But it doesn't mean I might not want to do something else in the future."

For now, though, he's never happier than when tinkering in his studio, laying down demos that somehow accidentally end up being finished albums. And one thing that hasn't changed, of course, is that he's still making the tea. "The kitchen is right next to the studio, so I tend to flick the kettle on as I'm passing in the morning," he says. "And then suddenly it's three hours later, and I've forgotten to have breakfast."

So he's a better musician than a tea boy, basically? "Well I don't know about that,"Astley smiles. "I do make a good cup of tea." ■

● Release details for Rick's new album will be announced soon



Rick Astley, pop icon, TikTokker, Smiths covers band frontman – and still makes a decent cuppa...

© Peter Neill

ASTLEY: I WON'T SAY NO (HOW COULD I?)

Of all the many reinventions of Rick Astley, none was more surprising than his appearance in 2021 fronting a Smiths tribute show with Manchester band Blossoms – a party trick they've reprised at this year's Glastonbury Festival.

© Getty

"They're a great band – they're younger than my daughter," smiles Astley, who discovered a shared passion for The Smiths after meeting the five-piece in Noel Gallagher's dressing room. "Only a small number of bands have inspired the sort of devotion that The Smiths do. And I know Morrissey has said a few things recently that people are unhappy with…"

So is Rick fulfilling a need for those who feel let down by Morrissey? "No," he insists. "Because there are some great Smiths covers bands out there. We just do our version of it."

The live shows were acclaimed by fans and critics alike ("Rick Astley makes an eerily good Morrissey," said *The Guardian*). One person who wasn't impressed, though, was Smiths legend Johnny Marr, who – somewhat disappointingly – described the idea as "funny and horrible at the same time."

"I can totally understand that," says Rick, ever the diplomat. "From Johnny's point of view, that's something he's crafted. It's part of his soul. But there are plenty of other bands doing it. He might be horrified to hear you can even do The Smiths at karaoke! I get why some people might want to lynch me, but I just think back to the reaction we received from the audience at those shows – which was euphoric, to be honest."

The Complete
FUN BOY THREE

5CD/DVD Box Set

This newly remastered 69 track collection bringing together 'The Fun Boy Three' and 'Waiting' albums, along with non-album singles, b-sides, remixes, and a live concert including a host of previously unreleased recordings.

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Released 4th August 2023

ELVIS COSTELLO & THE IMPOSTERS - THE DELIVERY MAN

JUST TURNED 50 AND 27 YEARS INTO HIS CAREER, A CREATIVELY RESTLESS ELVIS COSTELLO FOUND HIMSELF DABBLING IN MULTIPLE MUSICAL GENRES TO GENERALLY DIMINISHING RETURNS. THOUGH IT WAS LARGELY NEGLECTED UPON ITS RELEASE IN 2004, HIS 21ST STUDIO ALBUM *THE DELIVERY MAN* STANDS THE TEST OF TIME.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

★ ★

By 2004, Elvis Costello must have awoken each morning wondering which of his many musical incarnations would turn up for work. Quite apart from some 20 solo studio albums, there'd been soundtracks, from 1991's BAFTA-winning score for Alan Bleasdale's *G.B.H.*, composed alongside Richard Harvey, to *I Throw My Toys Around*, his and No Doubt's intervention in 1998's *The Rugrats Movie*. He'd flirted with classical music as well, whether 1993's ambitious *The Juliet Letters* with The Brodsky Quartet or contributing to John Harle's *Terror & Magnificence* (1997), on which he sang three compositions written for an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Costello's interest in jazz was also growing. 2003's disappointing *North* drifted in that direction, while 2006's *My Flame Turns Blue* would be compiled from recordings with Holland's Metropole Orkest at 2004's North Sea Jazz Festival. He'd penned material for others, too, whether Wendy James' *Now Ain't The Time For Your Tears*, an album knocked out in a single weekend in 1993 with then-wife and former Pogue Cait O'Riordan, or 2004's *The Girl In The Other Room*, his new fiancée Diane Krall's latest, for which they'd co-written the first original material she'd recorded. He'd even joined the great Burt Bacharach for 1998's masterful *Painted From Memory*, and that's not to mention cameos in *The Larry Sanders Show*, *Spiceworld* and *Austin Powers*.

However, 21 September 2004 proved unusually confusing. Across the world, simultaneously, a brace of Costellos materialised. The unlikeliest looked studious but relaxed on the sleeve of *Il Sogno*, a ballet score inspired by another Shakespeare play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, composed and recorded for classical label Deutsche Grammophon. The second might have been more recognisable if he weren't so shy, visible only as a shadow cast against a rusting Chevy on the cover of *The Delivery Man*, released by alt-country imprint Lost Highway. These twin Costellos couldn't have been more different, but nor could the responses they elicited.

Looking back, if it wasn't already remarkable that Costello had by now educated himself in musical notation and theory, it was even more astonishing that *Il Sogno*, these days little more than a footnote, topped Billboard's Classical Music charts. *The Delivery Man*, on the other hand, appears to have appealed mainly to critics, who, as they do, raved about a return to form. "Elvis has flattened the building," Stephen Dalton wrote memorably in *Uncut*, while *The Daily Telegraph*'s Ben Thompson was similarly effusive, praising a "welter of raucous blues and euphoric cow-punk". Sadly, accurate as both were, it became the lowest charting solo collection of Costello's British career and barely scraped the US Top 40.

Of the two, *The Delivery Man* has proven most enduring. Even if Costello can't be seen on the front, his qualities are unmistakable. Certainly, Tom Waits – to whose habits its opener, *Button My Lip*, was often compared – judged it one of his 20 all-time favourite albums. "Scalding hot *Bedlam*, *Monkey To Man*, *Needle Time*," he growled later to *The Guardian*. "I'd hate to be balled out by him, I'd quit first. Diatribes and rants with steam and funk. It has locomotion and heat."

That Costello had been inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2003 may have had something to do with this energy. More likely, it owed its southern-fried fervour

THE DELIVERY MAN IS AN ENDURING ALBUM. EVEN IF COSTELLO CAN'T BE SEEN ON THE FRONT, HIS QUALITIES ARE UNMISTAKABLE.

***The Delivery Man* flits between genres but has fire in its belly throughout**

to the circumstances of its recording. Reunited with most of The Attractions, these days known as The Imposters, he'd decamped to Sweet Tea Studios in Oxford, Mississippi, where he planned to tape songs by day before performing them by night.

This was a goal they failed to achieve – though the rawness often indicates that they did – and it wasn't the only intention to remain unfulfilled. Inspired by *Hidden Shame*, written for Johnny Cash's 1990 LP, *Boom Chicka Boom*, *The Delivery Man* was initially developed in 1999 as a concept album about three women's interactions with a man with a hidden past. What eventually emerged abandoned plot altogether, not that this mattered at all.

"I made the decision that I didn't want to present the story in chronological order," Costello told *Performing Songwriter* that autumn, "and I didn't necessarily want the success or failure of the album to be predicated upon the audience following that narrative. When you think of all the great songs that have come out of shows over the years, we don't remember the original shows that they came from at all. They're rarely revived. But yet the songs that come from them are timeless. So I'm skipping a whole page of the process."

As it happens, *Button My Lip* includes elements of Leonard Bernstein's and Stephen Sondheim's *America*, taken from *West Side Story*, but any Broadway comparisons end there. Instead, *The Delivery Man*'s songs,

THE IMPOSTERS WERE ON FIRE, WITH *MONKEY TO MAN*'S ROCK AND ROLL, *BEDLAM*'S PERCUSSIVE ROUGH AND TUMBLE AND THE UNRULY *NEEDLE TIME*

as promised, need no backstory, returning to territory explored on Costello's classic 1986 albums, the intermittently furious and intimate *Blood And Chocolate* and the Americana-influenced *King Of America*. Admittedly, 2002's *When I Was Cruel*, the first to feature The Imposters, had operated in similar realms, but *The Delivery Man* was significantly more consistent.

One reason is that, as Waits had implied, The Imposters were on fire, with *Monkey To Man*'s rock and roll, *Bedlam*'s percussive rough and tumble, and, suggesting Waits himself had pillaged Costello's own *Tokyo Storm Warning*, the unruly *Needle Time*. Even cult country act Lucinda Williams got stuck in, gruffly hollering *There's A Story In Your Voice*, in contrast to Emmylou Harris, who glowed on the sentimental *Nothing Clings Like Ivy* and, on *Heart Shaped Bruise*, helped raise the ghost of Gram Parsons, whose *Grievous Angel* she'd graced. She also wound things up with *The Scarlet Tide*'s Appalachian acoustics, originally co-written with T-Bone Burnett for Alison Krauss and 2003's *Cold Mountain* soundtrack.

And Costello? He was on peak form, teasing provocative lyrics such as the title track's "In a certain light he looked like Elvis/ In a certain way he seemed like Jesus" and crooning magnetically about how he'd "felt the cold hard facts of life/ Five degrees from freezing." His achievements would be overlooked, of course, and soon he'd have moved on to fresh pastures again, releasing the prosaically titled *Piano Jazz* with Marian McPartland, teaming up with Allen Toussaint on *The River In Reverse*, and appearing on Steve Nieve's opera, *Welcome To The Voice*.

Make no mistake, though: it's not *Il Sogno*'s classical Costello that's September 2004's classic, nor most other contemporary Costellos. It's *The Delivery Man*'s Costello, where Elvis not only lives up to the title's promise but is unafraid of boasting about it. As he concludes on *Button My Lip*, far less modestly than he presents himself on the album's cover, "I am the mighty and magnificent."

Goddess Rules: A transformative period sequestered in Thailand gave Dexys' Kevin Rowland the inspiration for a new album

© Bruno Murari

Divine Intervention

AS DEXYS PREPARE TO RETURN WITH THEIR MUCH-ANTICIPATED SIXTH STUDIO ALBUM, MAINSTAY KEVIN ROWLAND TELLS *CLASSIC POP* WHY HE FELT THE TIME WAS RIGHT TO SUBMIT TO *THE FEMININE DIVINE*

DAN BIGGANE

Eleven years since their last album of original music, the celebrated *One Day I'm Going To Soar*, Dexys are back with *The Feminine Divine*, a creative celebration of womanhood and a complex exploration of masculinity. A deeply personal, almost autobiographical, portrayal of a man whose views have matured over time, the nine new songs will leave the listener both spellbound and surprised in equal measure.

"The record tells a story," band leader Kevin Rowland tells *Classic Pop*. "It's a journey which starts with *The One That Loves You*, a song where the narrator pretends to be macho because that's what he's been brought up to believe. He's a guy that would threaten to beat you up if you touched his girlfriend. Jim Paterson [trombone] and I first wrote that track around 1991. I always thought it was really good, but we'd never used it, so it's serendipitous that it's found a place in these surroundings because it helps open the narrative of the record perfectly.

"The character's perspective was very much my stance at that point in my life, but that bravado was all pretend. The following song, *It's Alright Kevin (Manhood 2023)*, was written around a year ago and represents the reflective realisation that his machoism was all an act. It's an admission of how I actually feel.

"I'm not saying that the album is completely autobiographical, but there's definitely quite a lot of me in there. On the lead single, *I'm Going To Get Free*, the character is acknowledging his internalised problems and optimistically opening up and looking to move forward. Similarly, on *Coming Home*, the guy feels like he is actually returning to his true self.

"It wasn't my intention that these first few songs would be more traditional sounding Dexys numbers, it just worked out that way. However, at some point during the writing of the album, I noticed if we arranged them in a certain order it would work as a narrative.

"The title track is him examining his relationship with women and recognising that he's been severely wanting. The words for *The Feminine Divine* just came pouring out in one hit and I wasn't even in control of it. I had to chop around a few lines to make them work better, but all of the sentiment was there. *My Goddess Is* sees the character settle into a new relationship and the rest of the album follows that plot and how it develops.

Going To Soar: This year, Dexys perform the new LP in full as well as *Too-Rye-Ay* favourites

"It's here that the record adopts a more electronic sound. As the narrative shifts, the music follows suit. I think it works really well.

"Michael Timothy [keyboards and programming] and our producer Toby Chapman came up with a lot of the electronic ideas. Toby did quite a lot of work on the album, playing guitar and bass, as well as programming. I'd been wanting to explore that kind of music for a while and, prior to making *One Day I'm Going To Soar*, I was thinking we might've headed in that direction. However, while recording the drums on a hand-held Dictaphone, I realised how much I really liked the live sound on those tracks. So, now just seems like the right time to play around with electronic music.

"As we were finishing work on this album, I'd already started writing more songs. When I considered just how much work I've got to do on promotion, I decided to shelve any further new ideas until next year. But I'd really like to make another album, that's how I feel at the moment. I have great co-writers in Jim, Mike and Sean Read [saxophone, organ, and vocals]. I think the lyrics are really good and I found the creative process very cathartic."

> ***"THE FEMININE DIVINE* JUST CAME POURING OUT IN ONE HIT AND I WASN'T EVEN IN CONTROL OF IT. ALL OF THE SENTIMENT WAS THERE."**

While this celebration of womanhood and its challenge to preconceptions of masculinity proved a freeing experience for Rowland, making this album also helped the vocalist overcome a darkness which had developed following the release of 2016's *Let The Record Show: Dexys Do Irish And Country Soul*, an album of Irish folk standards and cover versions of songs from his youth.

"When we finished promoting the *Dexys Do Irish And Country Soul*, I just wanted to get away from the whole music business," Rowland reveals. "I'd just had enough and needed a break. I had no desire to do anything. I was approached to work on a fashion collaboration based on the clothes I wear, but that fell through, so I'd decided to work on myself for a bit instead. I travelled to Thailand and did some Tao courses. Whilst there they started talking about women as goddesses and my first reaction was 'she's not a goddess'… but then it dawned on me that actually they are. Women are incredibly powerful. That's when I started to evaluate my relationships with women and my attitudes towards them. I started to look at them differently."

The depiction of the feminine divine as a goddess not only features in the title of two tracks, the decadent *My Goddess Is* and saucy *Goddess Rules*, it is also represented in the striking painting chosen for the cover sleeve.

Rowland says: "I knew that we wanted a goddess on the front, and we commissioned an artist friend

You Wear It Well

Collectively, across several different incarnations of Dexys, group members have adopted a certain style which seemed reflective of the music they were releasing at the time. *Classic Pop*'s suggestion that the individual fashions on display in 2023 is more an expression of each band member's own identity, is greeted with an emphatic "Exactly!" by Kevin Rowland.

"That's absolutely what we tried to do," the frontman adds enthusiastically. "I think my look mirrors this record. The pink suit I'm wearing in some promotional pictures definitely reflects the album, as do other photographs where I'm wearing a skirt that goes down to the ankles. But everybody has their own style which reflects them."

Here we examine some of the distinct looks the band have adopted over the years…

© Getty

SEARCHING FOR THE YOUNG SOUL REBELS

Having noted The Specials' natty threads while Dexys were supporting the 2-Tone legends in 1979, Rowland decides his band needs its own individual style. Inspired by Big Jim Paterson's wardrobe, the collective don donkey jackets, leather coats and woolly hats, a look you could say had stepped right off the set of *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*. The singer would state: "We wanted to be a group that looked like something... a formed group, a project, not just random."

CATCH THE LOOK: The promotional music video for *Geno*, their terrific tribute to soul performer Geno Washington (1980).

© Getty

THE PROJECTED PASSION REVUE

Following debut LP *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels*, the band disintegrate leaving just Rowland and Paterson. With a new line-up secured and label disputes settled, Dexys find themselves on Mercury and release the Tony Visconti-produced single *Show Me*. With new band members comes an athletic new look: boxing boots replacing the hobnails and they switch from donkey jackets to hooded tops. The 1981 tracks, including radio sessions and live recordings, would resurface in 2007 as *The Projected Passion Revue*.

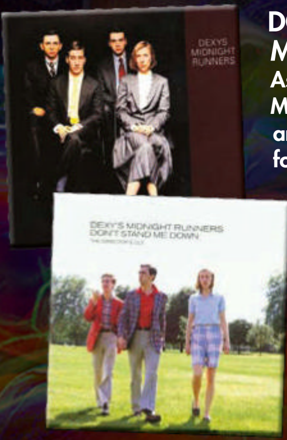
CATCH THE LOOK: Their energetic *Show Me* appearance on *Top Of The Pops* (1981).

© Getty

TOO-RYE-AY

With the introduction of The Emerald Express, a string section featuring classical violin student Helen Bevington (renamed Helen O'Hara by Rowland), Steve Shaw (Steve Brennan) and Roger Huckle (Roger MacDuff), a disgruntled brass section of Paterson, Brian Maurice and Paul Speare wanted to head for the door but agreed to record Dexys' next album, *Too-Rye-Ay*, before they exited in early 1982. A classic hybrid of soul and Celtic folk, the new sound is accompanied by complementary rustic clobber which includes dungarees, gypsy neckerchief scarves and leather waistcoats. The aesthetic went global courtesy of Julien Temple's iconic promotional video for the smash hit single *Come On Eileen*.

CATCH THE LOOK: We're forgoing Dexys' splendid lavatory performance of *Jackie Wilson Said (I'm In Heaven When You Smile)* during *The Young Ones* episode 'Bomb', for a rollicking run through *Come On Eileen* for children's Saturday morning telly programme *No.73* featuring a fresh-faced Sandi Toksvig (both from 1982).



DON'T STAND ME DOWN

As Paterson and Mickey Billingham are no longer in the fold, the nucleus of Dexys becomes Rowland, O'Hara, guitarist Billy Adams, and saxophonist Nick Gatfield. In September 1985, the group release their third studio album, *Don't Stand Me Down*. The core four are pictured on the sleeve looking like a team from *The Apprentice*. A style which Rowland refers to as an "Ivy League, Brooks Brothers" look, their yuppie business suits, and neatly quaffed hair could not have been further removed from their previous raggle-taggle incarnation. The style extends to the cover photo for 2002's definitive reissue, subtitled *The Director's Cut*, which depicts Rowland, Adams, and O'Hara strolling in a park wearing colourful preppy blazers and pastel plaid.

CATCH THE LOOK: The 12:23 minute video for *This Is What She's Like*, filmed on a deserted Fifth Avenue in New York and directed by Jack Hazan (1985).

© Getty

ONE DAY I'M GOING TO SOAR

Following a lengthy break, which sees Rowland go solo on *The Wanderer* (1988) and 1999's *My Beauty*, Dexys make a triumphant return in 2012 with *One Day I'm Going To Soar*. Featuring Paterson, Pete Williams and Mick Talbot alongside new recruits Neil Hubbard, Tim Cansfield, Lucy Morgan, and guest vocals from "The Muse" Madeleine Hyland, the acclaimed album is a lush amalgam of love and loathing, lust

Kevin Rowland unveils a new electronic direction for Dexys on part of *The Feminine Divine*

© Bruno Murari

"I TRY TO IGNORE STUFF ONLINE. ONCE YOU START THINKING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE'S REACTIONS, YOU'RE IN TROUBLE."

and loss, told over three acts. The cover art, a daring portrait captured by Chiko Ohayon, has a delicious film noir aesthetic, which is sleek, sophisticated and stylish.

CATCH THE LOOK: The delightful *Incapable Of Love* duet with Hyland live at the Duke of York's Theatre (2013).

DEXYS DO IRISH AND COUNTRY SOUL

For their fifth studio album, *Let The Record Show: Dexys Do Irish And Country Soul*, Dexys took on traditional Irish tunes alongside numbers that Rowland had always wanted to record such as Rod Stewart's *You Wear It Well* and The Bee Gees' *To Love Somebody*. With Rowland, Morgan, and Sean Read at its heart, this incarnation of Dexys enjoys a more relaxed retro vibe when it comes to fashion. However, the focus seems to be very much on hats... members can be seen sporting a baker boy flat cap, beret and fedora in the stylish promotional photographs for this release.

CATCH THE LOOK: Count the different styles of hat you can spot as Dexys saunter around the boutiques of London's Brick Lane in the video for their cover of Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now* – we can spot a total of eight or nine...

THE FEMININE DIVINE

After taking some time out to refocus his energy, Rowland returns to music with a fresh perspective and new-found positivity. Alongside Paterson, Read and Michael Timothy, Dexys sound as essential as ever. Their sixth studio album, *The Feminine Divine*, is a fascinating listen and the vibrancy of the music extends to how the different members present themselves individually. Rowland said: "That's exactly something we did in the photoshoots, even down to the way we hold ourselves and the stances we take. We're all wearing and doing something different."

CATCH THE LOOK: : In the video for the Northern Soul-inspired *I'm Going To Get Free*, Rowland can be seen dancing in a park and strolling down Bethnal Green Road, much to the bemusement of passers-by, in a flamboyant red coverall suit before hooking up with his bandmates. "Walking down that street felt great," reveals Rowland. "In my head I thought that people would be pissed off, but they're not, they're all laughing and smiling."

© Sandra Vijandi

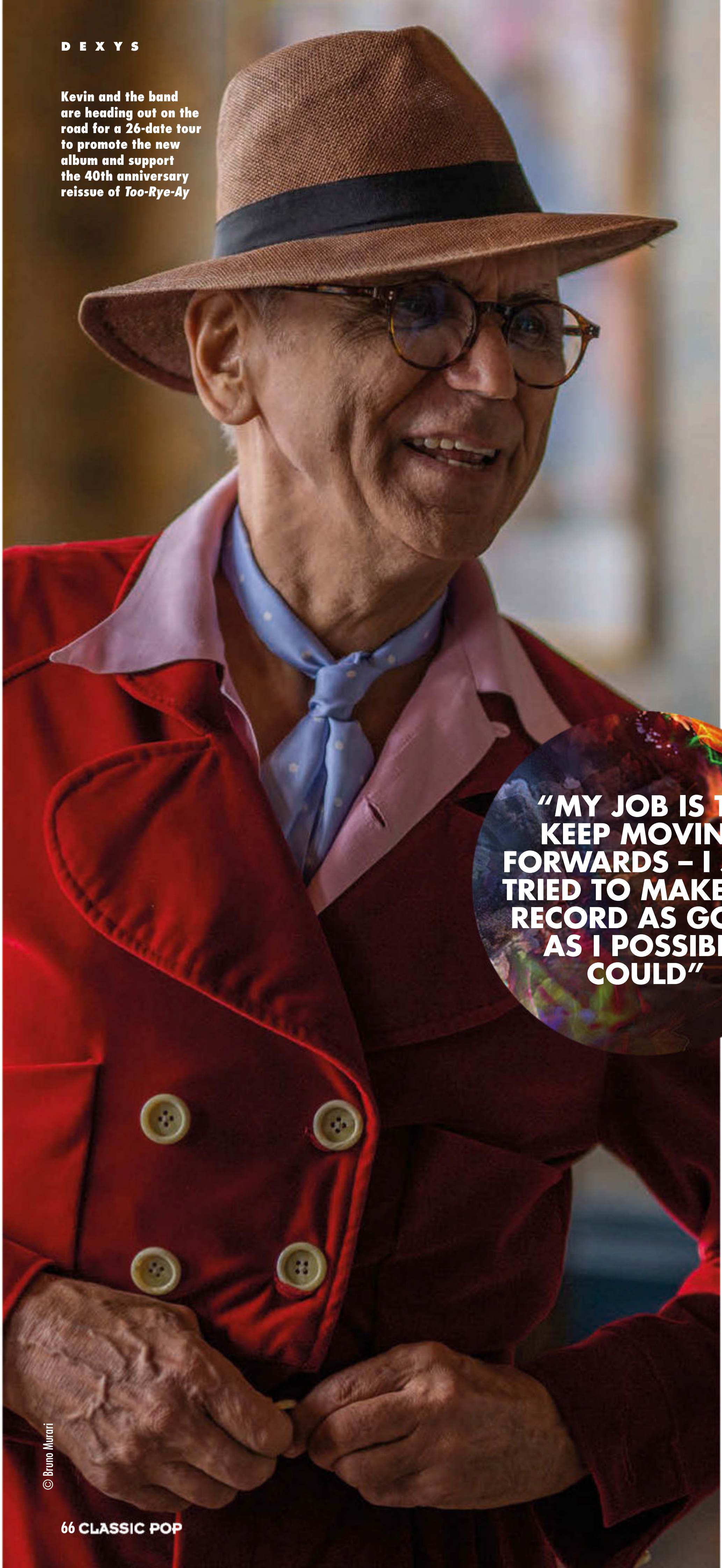
Dance Stance: The ever-evolving Dexys in their latest guise

to come up with something. She created a piece and, while it was good, I didn't feel that it really nailed what we were after. We all agreed that we needed to get something more goddessy and powerful. Mike sent me a picture he had found of Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire and volcanoes, and I immediately knew that was the image we needed. The label was worried it might prove too costly to secure but I was insistent and willing to pay for it myself. Some people suggested that we had a picture of the band on the cover, and I was like 'No thank you!'

"I try not to read too many comments online, but when the album picture was revealed, I saw somebody say, 'That's not a Dexys cover'... I don't know what a Dexys cover actually *is* or should be! I don't want to be identifiable by a cover and think they have all been reasonably different from each other. We've always tried to make them different."

The Feminine Divine's first half is full of brassy music-hall vigour, while the second is a daring departure from anything that Dexys have done before. A sumptuous, synth-driven, stripped-back delight, the album may come as a surprise for many lifelong fans.

"Again, I try to ignore stuff online," admits Rowland when asked what he hopes fans will take away from the album. "Once you start thinking about other people's reactions, you're in trouble. I appreciate the people who are into Dexys and that buy the records and go to our shows. However, some of them are only interested in Dexys from 1981 or 1982. Maybe that was a golden period for them in their lives, and I understand that, but that's not something I can be too worried about. That's not my job. My job is to keep moving forward and once you



Kevin and the band are heading out on the road for a 26-date tour to promote the new album and support the 40th anniversary reissue of *Too-Rye-Ay*

© Bruno Murari

"MY JOB IS TO KEEP MOVING FORWARDS – I JUST TRIED TO MAKE THE RECORD AS GOOD AS I POSSIBLY COULD"

start playing the game of trying to be who, or how, you were in the 80s, I think you're in danger. I don't want to do that.

"On *The Feminine Divine* I just tried to serve the art. I know that might sound a bit pretentious, and perhaps 'serve the inspiration' is a better phrase, but I just tried to make the record as good as I possibly could. I think it's got something going on and that's important... as for fan reaction? I can't predict that."

So, while Dexys' frontman is hopeful fans will embrace *The Feminine Divine* and keep up with the band as they move forward, *Classic Pop* wonders what he thinks the younger Kevin Rowland of *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels* and *Too-Rye-Ay* would make of it all.

"Oh, he would be completely baffled by it," laughs Kevin. "He'd be *totally* flummoxed and think, 'What the fuck?' I don't think he'd like it... but I don't think that guy really knew who he was anyway."

In September, the revived Dexys embark on a 26-date tour of the UK, Ireland and mainland Europe to promote *The Feminine Divine*. It will be the band's first concentrated run of shows since 2013 as a scheduled tour, to support the 40th anniversary of 1982's classic album *Too-Rye-Ay*, was cancelled in 2022 after Rowland was involved in a motorbike accident.

"I have mixed feelings about touring," admits the singer. "I'm looking forward to it because, for the first half of the show, we will be performing the new album in its entirety. We will be acting the songs out with a female character who's going to be played by Claudia Chopek. The second half is going to be old songs and we'll be playing a lot of stuff from *Too-Rye-Ay* to compensate for those cancelled live dates. I think it's a really strong idea for a concert and I'm excited about that.

"Simultaneously, I'm also very nervous because I've got a lot of work to do between now and then to make it happen. I've got to get my voice in shape and build up my stamina."

"I'm getting there," Kevin continues, "I'll easily be well enough to do the shows and my leg will be OK, but it's just gonna take time. It is a lot better than it was."

With Rowland turning 70 this August, it's heartening to hear just how much he's enjoying making music again, especially when the material brims with such verve and vitality. *The Feminine Divine* is a euphoric return which highlights just how hungry Dexys are to mature and move forward – to inspire and be inspired. ■

● ***The Feminine Divine* is released on 28 July via 100% Records and reviewed on page 79**

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formerly known as
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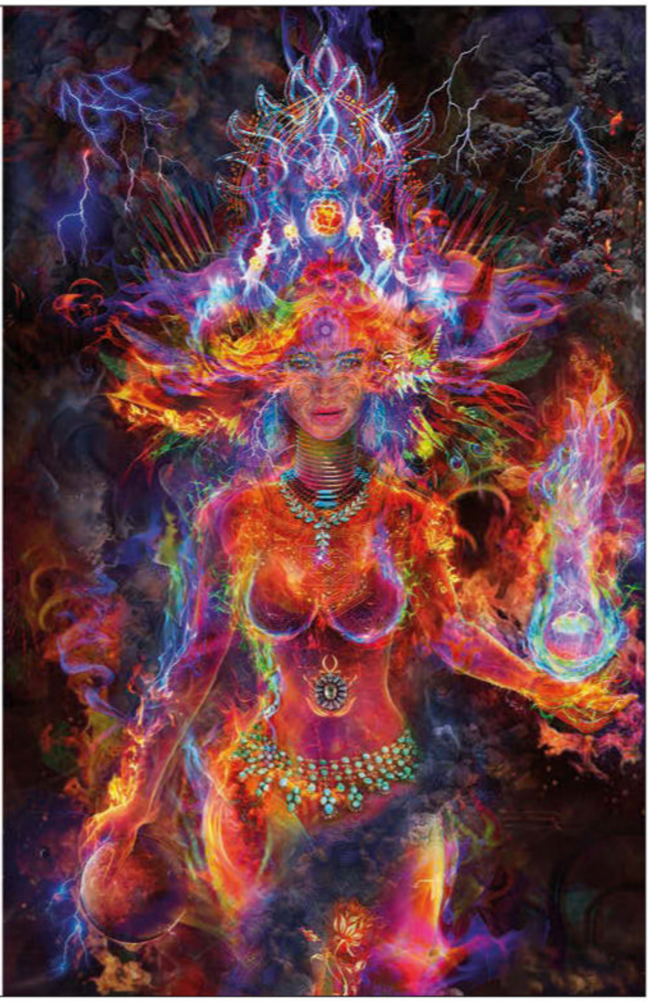

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TOP 20 LIVERPUDLIAN SINGLES OF THE 80s

DURING THE LATE 70s, LIVERPOOL WAS A VERITABLE HIVE OF CREATIVITY, AND IN THE ENSUING DECADE SEVERAL MUSICIANS MADE A CULTURAL MARK JUST AS SIGNIFICANT AS THE ONE LEFT BY THEIR MERSEYBEAT FOREBEARS

BARRY PAGE

The achievements of Merseybeat legends like The Beatles and Gerry And The Pacemakers put Liverpool on the cultural map, and the city has once again been in the headlines when it hosted this year's Eurovision Song Contest. In the heart of the world-famous Mathew Street was the city's creative hub of Eric's, a thriving live venue and mecca for untapped talent, and it was here that some of the most successful acts of the 80s kickstarted their careers. With a rule of one track per act, we've picked out 20 of the decade's finest Liverpudlian singles.

20

YACHTS
I.O.U. (IN THE ODDMENTS DRAWER) (1980)

Boasting future members of The Christians and It's Immaterial, powerpop act Yachts evolved from a sprawling seven-piece combo named Albert Dock And The Cod Warriors (who'd once supported the Sex Pistols at Eric's), and released John Peel-approved debut single *Suffice To Say* in 1977. Despite two well-received LPs and some favourable US attention, mainstream success eluded the band, who'd started to splinter by the time of this New Wave nugget, whose goofy title had partly been inspired by hit TV show *Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads?*

19

THE PALE FOUNTAINS
THANK YOU (1982)

Heavily influenced by 60s chamber pop, The Pale Fountains signed to Virgin in 1982 following a label frenzy, but sales never quite matched the hype. This standalone single narrowly missed the UK Top 40, but the commercial failure of their two studio albums led to primary songwriter Michael Head forming Shack in 1987. Head's career has since been blighted by ill-fortune and substance abuse, but he's enjoying a renaissance with the Red Elastic Band, garnering a level of acclaim befitting of a man *NME* once proclaimed the UK's greatest songwriter.

18

A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS
I RAN (SO FAR AWAY) (1982)

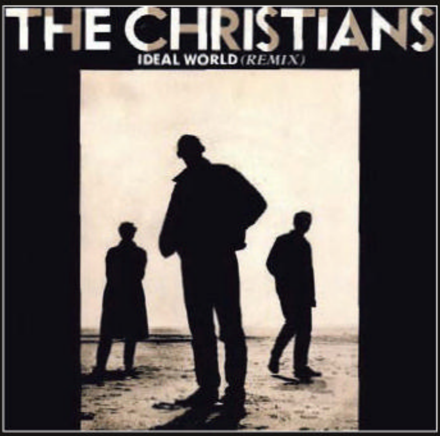
Formed in 1979, A Flock Of Seagulls took their name from a line in *Toiler On The Sea* by The Stranglers, whom bizarrely-coiffured frontman Mike Score had seen perform at Eric's. In the UK, the band are best known for Top 10 grazer *Wishing (If I Had A Photograph Of You)*, but Stateside they made a greater impact, not only winning a Grammy for instrumental *D.N.A.*, but also bagging a huge hit with perennial radio favourite *I Ran (So Far Away)*. Its success was propelled in part by an eye-catching video that received heavy rotation on the fledgling MTV channel.

17

THE ICICLE WORKS

BIRDS FLY (WHISPER TO A SCREAM) (1983)

Formed in 1980 – their name inspired by a short story by science fiction writer Frederik Pohl – in the early throes of their career The Icicle Works were influenced by local luminaries such as Echo And The Bunnymen and The Teardrop Explodes. The Ian McNabb-fronted powerhouse trio enjoyed modest UK success with *Love Is A Wonderful Colour*, but made a bigger impact across the Atlantic with an edited version of *Birds Fly (Whisper To A Scream)*, which *Smash Hits* beautifully described as "a joyous pop song, full of wondrous open-eyed optimism."

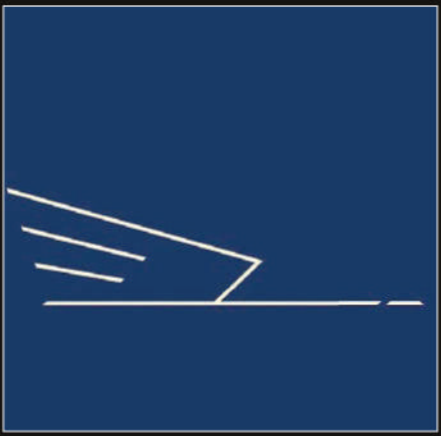


16

THE CHRISTIANS

IDEAL WORLD (1987)

Originally a five-piece a cappella group, the Christian brothers came to the attention of former Yachts songwriter, co-vocalist and keyboardist Henry Priestman during the recording of It's Immaterial's *Ed's Funky Diner* in 1985. Soon after, the part-time Itsy member hooked up with brothers Garry, Russell and Roger to form The Christians, who scored four Top 40s hits in '87. Reflecting on the racial segregation and greed of apartheid's regime, *Ideal World* evolved from a demo of *The Game*, penned by Henry with childhood friend and future filmmaker Mark Herman.



15

THE WILD SWANS

REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT (1982)

Founded by Bill Drummond and Dave Balfe in 1978, Zoo Records provided an outlet for a number of Liverpudlian acts to release their first singles, and it was on this legendary label that The Wild Swans – fronted by the well-read Paul Simpson, a former member of The Teardrop Explodes – cut one of the greatest singles of the post-punk era. Produced by Bunnyman Pete de Freitas, *Revolutionary Spirit* was favourably reviewed in the inkies, but the band's existence was fleeting, until a new lineup emerged with the excellent *Bringing Home The Ashes* LP in 1988.

14

CARE

FLAMING SWORD (1983)

Following the premature demise of The Wild Swans, frontman Paul Simpson formed baroque pop act Care with former Big In Japan guitarist Ian Broudie. On this near-hit, lyrical inspiration came from an unlikely source. One morning, as Simpson worked on a backing tape Broudie had left for him at their rented ground floor space, he was interrupted by a young Asian lady who had a tropical houseplant for sale. Recalling the tale, Simpson revealed she'd whispered, "Will you buy my flaming sword?" Broudie later repurposed the track as a Lightning Seeds B-side.

13

CHINA CRISIS

WISHFUL THINKING (1983)

As culturally important as the Zoo label, Inevitable Records not only released early singles by Dead Or Alive, It's Immaterial and Wah! Heat, it also helped to launch the career of China Crisis, who'd formed in 1979. During the making of their sophomore album, producer Mike Howlett introduced the band to an Emulator synthesizer, whose synthetic strings were used extensively on *Wishful Thinking*, a song that had taken its sonic inspiration from Brian Eno's *Here He Comes*. Augmented by some soothing oboe work, this wistful number hit the UK Top 10 in 1984.

12

THE MIGHTY WAH!

COME BACK (1984)

Fronted by Eric's regular Pete Wylie, Wah! Heat released a brace of John Peel-endorsed singles on the Inevitable label, before signing with WEA. As Wah!, they secured a huge hit with *The Story Of The Blues (Part One)* in 1982, but major label relations soon soured, and Wylie later vented his spleen on an embryonic version of *Come Back*, their rousing debut single for Beggars Banquet. The modified lyrics were penned in response to an article Wylie had read in *The Guardian*, which suggested the majority of Liverpudlians wanted to leave the city.

11

THE LOTUS EATERS
THE FIRST PICTURE OF YOU (1983)

The Lotus Eaters included ex-members of The Wild Swans and The Teardrop Explodes, and attracted major label interest following a Peel Session in October 1982. Debut single *The First Picture Of You* was released in the midst of a record-breaking heatwave in July 1983, and there was arguably no song that evinced the sound of a heady summer more than this invigorating classic. "I like to think of our music as having a comforting quality," singer Peter Coyle told *Smash Hits*, "to lead people off and get them thinking about the good things in life."

10

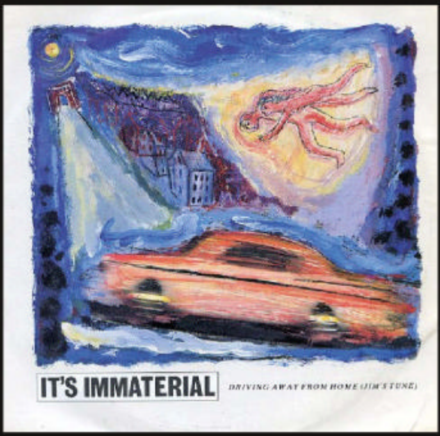
THE KLF
WHAT TIME IS LOVE (1988)

Having gained notoriety as the act who burnt one million pounds, it's easy to overlook the achievements of Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty, who racked up a number of hits in the late 80s and early 90s, including novelty chart-topper *Doctorin' The Tardis* (under the guise of The Timelords). Aside from being pioneers of the plunderphonics genre, The KLF also released what is generally considered to be the first ever trance record. A flop upon its original 1988 release, the groundbreaking *What Time Is Love* was later repurposed as a classic stadium house anthem.

09

THE LIGHTNING SEEDS
PURE (1989)

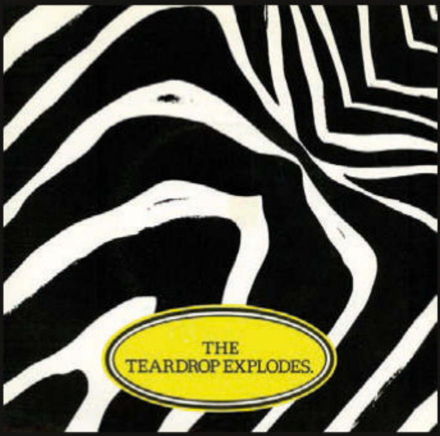
Throughout the 80s, Penny Lane-born musician Ian Broudie was an in-demand producer, helming albums for several acts, including the Bunnymen. But the former Original Mirrors and Care guitarist was at heart a songwriter and musician, and, after encouragement from The Fall's Mark E. Smith, started The Lightning Seeds. Glistening debut single *Pure* arrived like a sunburst in summer 1989 and attained transatlantic hit status, but there was also plenty to recommend about parent album *Cloudcuckooland*, whose guests included Ian McNabb and Andy McCluskey.



08

IT'S IMMATERIAL
DRIVING AWAY FROM HOME (JIM'S TUNE) (1986)

It's Immaterial – whose original 1980 lineup included former Yachtsmen John Campbell, Martin Dempsey and Henry Priestman – were a peripheral presence on the Liverpudlian scene until this idiosyncratic travelogue rewarded them with an unlikely Top 20 hit in 1986. Originally recorded with Talking Heads' Jerry Harrison, their distinctly British take on the US driving song described, in deadpan detail, a journey from Liverpool to Glasgow via the M62. The subtitle was a nod to the harmonica skills of Jim Lieber.



07

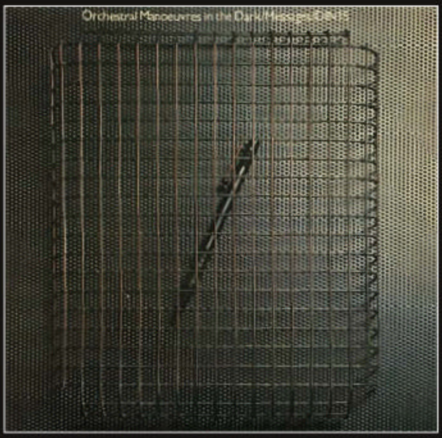
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
REWARD (1981)

Taking their name from a 1971 issue of Marvel comic *Daredevil* that one-time member Paul Simpson found in his basement, The Teardrop Explodes formed in 1978. Their biggest hit was *Reward*, whose frenetic pace was dictated by pill-popping frontman Julian Cope, who wanted the single to resemble a sped-up Northern Soul classic, replete with brass in the style of seminal Love album *Forever Changes*. "It's a mad awesome record unlike anything else in pop," keyboardist Dave Balfe told *The Guardian*. "We sounded like Vikings on acid fronted by a lunatic."

06

BLACK
WONDERFUL LIFE (1986)

Although originally a trio, by the time of this classic single on the Ugly Man label in 1986, Black was essentially a solo vehicle for classically-trained crooner Colin Vearncombe. The somewhat sarcastically titled *Wonderful Life* was one of the songs he'd penned during a dark period of homelessness and divorce, and it found favour with Liverpudlian DJ Janice Long, who proclaimed it her Record of the Week on Radio 1. Despite its disappointing chart performance, the single attracted the attention of A&M Records, who ensured it was a hit the following year.



05

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK

MESSAGES (1980)

One of OMD's earliest songs, *Messages* was inspired by Andy McCluskey's dilemma of whether to respond to a former girlfriend's letters. A version was included on the band's debut LP, but they were persuaded to re-record it with producer Mike Howlett. The result was the first in a string of Top 20 hits. *Smash Hits* were fans, with their Esmé Sprigg saying that the song displays OMD's "gentle touch and masterly restraint to maximum advantage. Interlocking melodic ideas, plaintive vocal, generally haunting stuff."

04

THE LA'S

THERE SHE GOES (1988)

Notable for its chiming riff and an irresistible melody worthy of Liverpool's rich musical heritage, this classic by The La's was originally released in 1988, and looked destined to become one of the jewels on their debut album. The problem was that frontman Lee Mavers was a perfectionist, and no producer was able to realise his artistic vision. The band's impatient label released a Steve Lillywhite-helmed incarnation of the album in 1990 – which included a new hit version of *There She Goes* – but it was promptly disowned by the now-reclusive maverick.

03

DEAD OR ALIVE

YOU SPIN ME ROUND (LIKE A RECORD) (1984)

Fronted by one-time Probe Records employee Pete Burns, whose customer put-downs were legendary, Dead Or Alive formed in 1980 out of proto-goth outfit Nightmares In Wax. They're best remembered for this Hi-NRG classic, which, upon its release, took an incredible four months to reach the chart summit. Whilst it was Luther Vandross and Little Nell who provided its structural and titular inspiration, it was Stock Aitken and Waterman who applied the final gloss on one of the most iconic singles of the decade.

02

ECHO AND THE BUNNYMEN

THE KILLING MOON (1983)

While ambitious fourth LP *Ocean Rain* didn't quite live up to its billing as "the greatest album ever made", in *The Killing Moon* the Bunnymen certainly delivered one of the finest singles of the 80s. According to trenchcoated frontman Ian McCulloch, some of the spiritual lyrics arrived in a dream, while its chord sequence was derived from playing David Bowie's *Space Oddity* backwards. "It's a psalm, almost hymnal," he told *The Guardian*. "It's about everything, from birth to death to eternity and God and the eternal battle between fate and the human will."

01

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

RELAX (1983)

Following their performance on anarchic TV show *The Tube* in 1983, there wasn't exactly a clamour for the unsigned Frankie's signatures, with potential suitors ostensibly put off by the sight of frontmen Holly Johnson and Paul Rutherford in their S&M fetish gear. However, producer extraordinaire Trevor Horn was persuaded that the subversive act were the perfect fit for the ZTT label he'd just co-founded. He was also convinced that *Relax* was a potential hit, but it wasn't until he'd enlisted the services of musicians such as J.J. Jeczalik, Stephen Lipson and Andy Richards that he was able to realise his creative vision for the single, which was eventually released in October that year.

The 12" included a version of *Ferry Cross The Mersey*, the band then unaware they'd eventually match Gerry And The Pacemakers' feat of scoring three chart-toppers with their first trio of releases. A veritable slow-burner, *Relax* took several weeks to reach the upper echelons of the charts, but it received a priceless promotional boost in the wake of a ban by the BBC, who deemed its sexually-charged lyrics to be offensive. Frankie's star would eventually burn out, but during pop's greatest year they achieved more in 12 months than many of their contemporaries would during their entire careers.

SUPER FAN

DEVOTED FANS SHOW US THEIR COLLECTIONS AND POP MEMORABILIA

SHAKESPEARS SISTER/ MARCELLA DETROIT

ANDREI KAMOV, SAN FRANCISCO

Q When did you first become a Superfan of Shakespears Sister and Marcella Detroit – and why do you like them?

A It was the *Hormonally Yours* era, 1992. As a teenager I was fascinated by the magic of their voices and artistry, bedazzled by the shining lights of the shimmering world of Shakespears Sister. The band was so unique, there was no artist like them to me.

Q What do you have in your personal collection?

A After over three decades, my collection is pretty much complete: CD albums and CD singles, 12" and 7" records, cassettes, posters and magazines, T-shirts and boxsets, books and DVDs, badges and bags...

Q How much money have you spent on it all?

A Definitely thousands and thousands of dollars, but what a joy it is to hold a new addition to the collection in my hands. At that moment, you don't think about the fact you paid another hundred bucks for an item!

Q What's your favourite item in the collection?

A Marcella Detroit and her *Feeler* era was glorious! There's her *MTV Buzz Live* CD, a beautiful rarity I love, a Japanese promo boxset for the *Feeler* album with a folded poster and videotape – which is a piece of art – as well as a Taiwanese version of *Feeler*. I also love two impossible-to-find records from Marcella's pre-Shakespears years – *Ballerina* and a picture sleeve 7" of her *Help Me* duet with Robin Gibb. Also, Shakespears Sister's *Our History* boxset is stunning!

Q Have you ever met either Marcella or Siobhan?

A Yes, I'm grateful and lucky! 10 years after I first saw them on TV, I got to meet Marcella here in San Francisco at a gig. Since then, there have been tours in the UK and many gigs here in California. After one in L.A., Marcy gave me a little award in the shape of a star with my name on it. And in 2019, during the Shakespears Sister Ride Again tour I got to meet Siobhan and see the duo together – a dream come true.

AND FINALLY...

Q And if you could ask them one question...?

A *Hello (Turn Your Radio On)* from *Hormonally Yours* is one of my favourite songs. It's more rhetorical but it has always amazed me how at the age of 30 one would come up with such a profound song: "Life is a strange thing, just when you think you've learned how to use it, it's gone."

Q Is there one item that you would love to get your hands on?

A The rarest German *You're History* single with the alternative cover.

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ACID JAZZ

A FUNKY STEW OF JAZZ, HIP-HOP AND GOOD-TIME VIBES

STEVE O'BRIEN

WHAT IS IT?

Few music subgenres have ever burned as brightly and possessed such a thoroughgoing joie de vivre as acid jazz. A heady, percussion-fuelled brew of jazz, soul, funk and hip-hop, this oh-so-early-90s movement was the baby of Eddie Piller and Gilles Peterson who fathered the Acid Jazz record label in 1987, with their first release being *Frederick Lies Still* by Galliano, a club-targeted reworking of Curtis Mayfield's soul funk classic *Freddie's Dead*.

It was Peterson who landed upon the name Acid Jazz (though it was DJ Chris Bangs who'd coined it), a phrase that fused the genre's jazz foundations with the then current acid house craze. The label had its origins in two club nights, overseen by Piller and Peterson – Mondays at The Wag in Soho and Sundays at Camden's Dingwalls.

The faces that came to define acid jazz – The Brand New Heavies, The James Taylor Quartet, Jamiroquai et al – were all part of that achingly hip scene, swiftly signing to this most zeitgeisty of labels.

Peterson would eventually quit Acid Jazz to set up his own label, Talkin' Loud, taking Galliano with him and signing such acts as Incognito, Young Disciples, Wild & Peaceful and Ace Of Clubs.

Acid jazz would become one of the dominant sounds of the UK charts in the early 90s, but its time in the sun would be short-lived. Electronic dance music from the likes of Fatboy Slim and The Chemical Brothers saw acid jazz off in clubland and, while individual artists like Jamiroquai would continue to flourish, most of those first wavers would either split or find themselves struggling to match their earliest commercial peaks.

ESSENTIAL SINGLES

THE BRAND NEW HEAVIES
MIDNIGHT AT THE OASIS

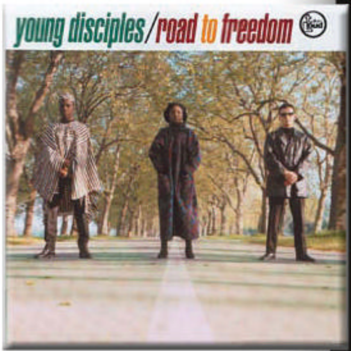
INCOGNITO
EVERYDAY

D'INFLUENCE
MIDNITE

FREAK POWER
TURN ON, TUNE IN, COP OUT

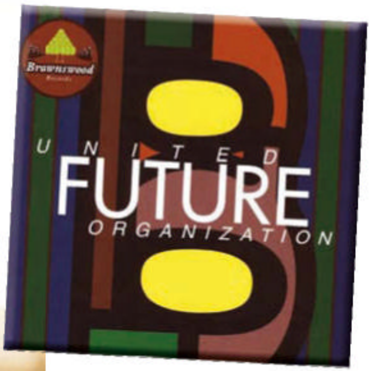
DIANA BROWN & BARRY K SHARPE
THE MASTERPLAN

ESSENTIAL ALBUMS



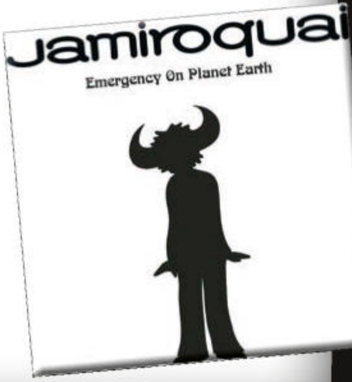
YOUNG DISCIPLES
ROAD TO FREEDOM (1991)

An early signing to Gilles Peterson's Talkin' Loud label, Young Disciples would release just one album in their all-too-brief lifetime. They remain best known for their No.13 hit *Apparently Nothin'* from 1991, but there's much to love on their sole long-player, including the flute-flecked *Get Yourself Together* and epic Mick Talbot co-penned *Freedom Suite*.



UNITED FUTURE ORGANIZATION
UNITED FUTURE ORGANIZATION (1993)

United Future Organization were formed in Japan in 1990 and released this, their second album, in 1993. Warm and mellow, with traces of trip-hop, this deserved to break bigger than it did. Standout tracks include *Poetry And All That Jazz*, *Vinyl Junkie* and *My Foolish Dream*.



JAMIROQUAI
EMERGENCY ON PLANET EARTH (1993)

'The cat in the hat', as Jay Kay fancily nicknamed himself, was a relative latecomer to the acid jazz ball, releasing his first album as Jamiroquai in 1993. Thirty years on, its funk-tastic grooves still have the power to compel even the shyest onto the dancefloor. Of course it's heavily in debt to Stevie Wonder but the reality was, even he wasn't producing anything this good in the mid-90s.

WHAT THEY SAY

"Acid jazz had its time. In the end, it got taken over by the marketing people – people with no taste or politics. It became a very easy, lazy way of marketing jazz."
Gilles Peterson, quoted in The Guardian

"We weren't allowed to trademark the label because they said that we didn't think it up and that it was a musical genre before us. That was a bit surprising and it allowed the doors to open and for people to just call any old crap acid jazz."
Eddie Piller, quoted in The Yorkshire Post

"The music played by a generation raised on jazz as well as funk and hip-hop, acid jazz used elements of all three. Its existence as a percussion-heavy, primarily live music placed it closer to jazz and Afro-Cuban than any other dance style, but its insistence on keeping the groove allied it with funk, hip-hop and dance music." **Allmusic**

"Hip kids who picked up the baton of 1970s jazz-funk found a union with beat-heavy funk and soul champions, R&B protagonists, and even the lysergic electronica pioneers of underground acid house." **Louder Than War**

ESSENTIAL ARTISTS

Corduroy

Like their fellow retro-instrumentalists The James Taylor Quartet, Corduroy brought the sounds of Swinging London into the 90s with a string of *Blow-Up*-inspired tracks that had the spirit of Carnaby Street coursing through their chords. Formed in 1991 by twins Ben and Scott Addison with guitarist Simon Nelson-Smith and former Doctor And The Medics bass man Richard Searle, the self-dubbed "fabric four" released their first long-player, *Dad Man Cat*, in 1992. Neither that album, nor its various follow-ups, charted highly and Corduroy remained on popular culture's culty fringes. They released their latest LP, *Return Of The Fabric Four*, in 2018 on, yes, Acid Jazz Records.

Incognito

Unlike many of their Acid Jazz Records labelmates, Incognito had been going long before Piller and Peterson's brainwave. Formed in 1979, the band released their first album, *Jazz Funk*, in 1981, but didn't put out another LP until 1991's *Inside Life*, from which they enjoyed their first chart hit, a cover of Ronnie Laws' 1975 track *Always There*. Featuring a guest vocal by US R&B singer Jocelyn Brown, it peaked at No.6 in the UK. A year later Incognito scored their second Top 20 hit, this time with a cover of Stevie Wonder's *Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing*, featuring vocals from American jazzster Maysa Leak. They've continued to record and tour in the years since, though, with an ever-revolving lineup – the amount of past members give The Fall a run for their money – releasing their most recent record, *Tomorrow's New Dream*, in 2019 through Bluey Music.

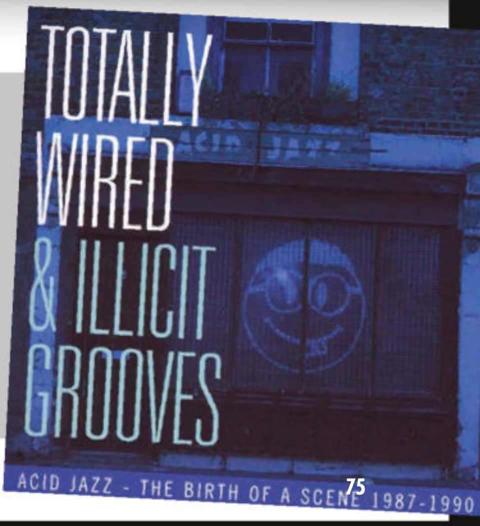
The Brand New Heavies

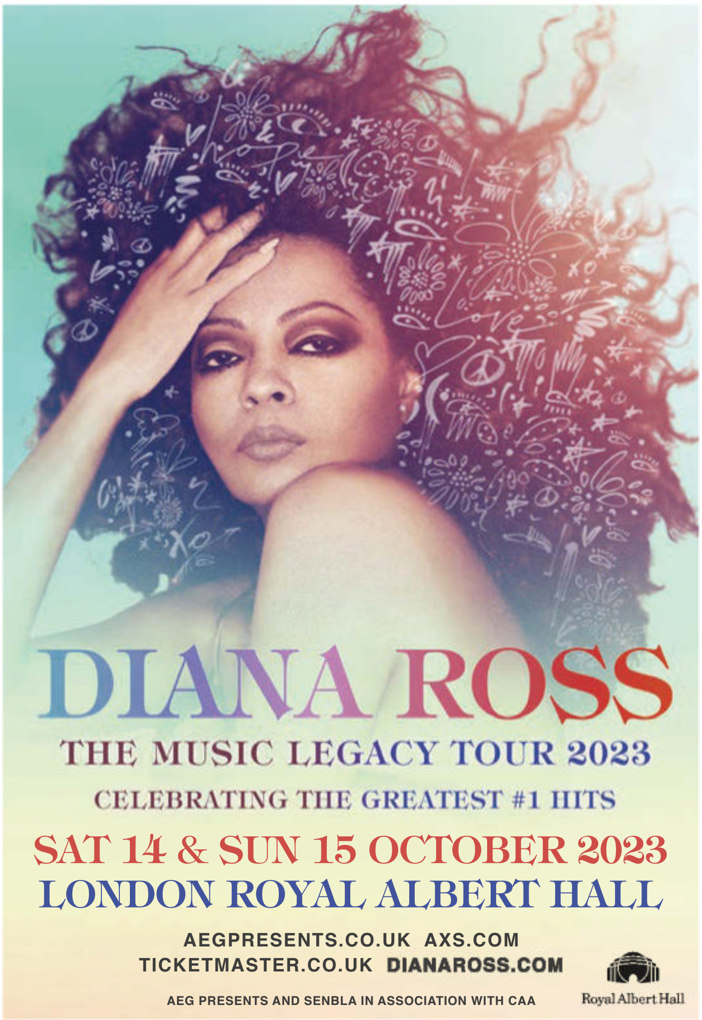
If a Mount Rushmore for acid jazz is ever constructed (c'mon, Sunak!), Simon Bartholomew and Andrew Levy should get first dibs to take the George Washington and Thomas Jefferson spots. The pair formed The Brand New Heavies in 1985 and released their self-titled debut (on Acid Jazz Records, natch) in 1990. Most of those early hits, including *Don't Let It Go to Your Head*, *Dream Come True* and *Never Stop*, were waxed with N'Dea Davenport as singer, who, despite leaving in 1995, has returned to the fold several times since. The band are still together, having released their last album, *TBNH*, in 2019.

© Getty

Further listening

Totally Wired & Illicit Grooves – Acid Jazz – The Birth Of A Scene 1987-1990 (BGP)

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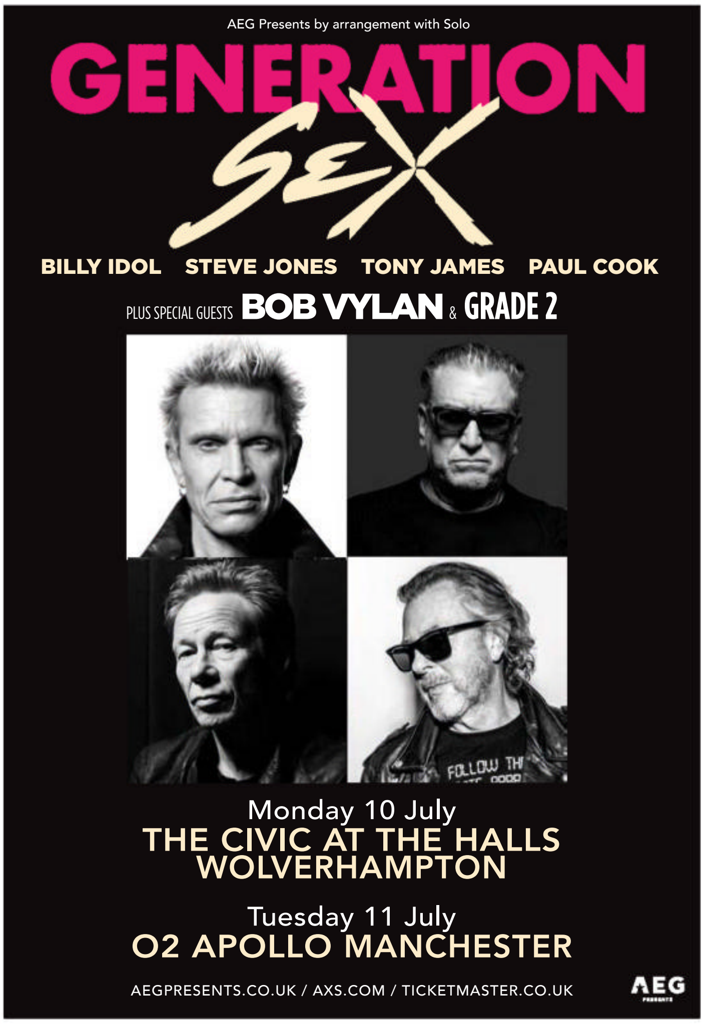
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Reviews

William Orbit collaborator Georgia is dancefloor-bound once more with her new album *Euphoric*

THE HOT LIST 78
Suede at 30, Noel Gallagher, Cher, The Coral, David Bowie

NEW RELEASES 79
Dexys, Public Image Ltd, Soft Cell, Blur, The Lilac Time, Georgia, 80s Classical With Nik Kershaw, Carol Decker, Johnny Hates Jazz And The Orchestra of Opera North, Stewart Copeland, Kelly Clarkson, Steve Lukather, John Mellencamp, The Hives, Rita Ora, Anne-Marie, Jungle, The View, Penguin Cafe, Joe McAlinden, Django Django, Steven Jones And Logan Sky, Girl Ray

REISSUES 86
Fun Boy Three, ABC, Pet Shop Boys, Wham!, David Sylvian, Talking Heads, NOW, Landscape, Paul Hardcastle, Dead Or Alive, Bad Manners, Arthur Baker, Dannii Minogue, Girls Aloud, The Sound

LIVE 94
Peter Gabriel, James

BOOKS 97
Rave New World: Confessions Of A Raving Reporter by Kirk Field; *Bowie Odyssey 73* by Simon Goddard, *Listen To My Heart: Life, Love & Roxette* by Marie Fredriksson with Helena von Zweigbergk; *This Must Be The Place* by Jesse Rifkin

RATINGS

EXCELLENT ★★★★★
VERY GOOD ★★★★
GOOD ★★★
PATCHY ★★
POOR ★

© Will Spooner

THE

HOT LIST

NEW RELEASES THAT NEED TO BE ON YOUR CULTURAL RADAR

STEVE HARNELL

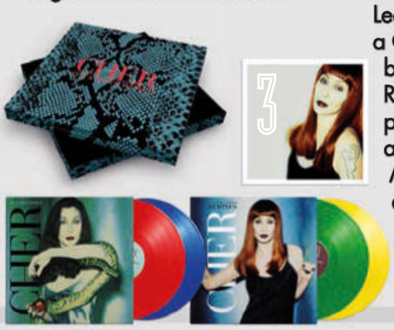
© Kevin Cummins

1 SUEDE30
SUEDE
Marking its 30th anniversary, Suede's much-loved eponymous debut is being revisited for some limited edition new twists on 7 July. On offer will be a Blu-Ray audio edition centred on a 5.1 mix and Dolby Atmos revamp by Steven Wilson plus a half-speed remaster on 180g black vinyl. Also available is a newly mastered 2CD edition complete with B-sides, a limited edition full album picture disc with bespoke sleeve, and highly collectable 30th anniversary 7" picture discs of the band's first four singles.

2 COUNCIL SKIES
NOEL GALLAGHER
The Chief may have moved away from the club-friendly experiments of the *Black Star Dancing* EP but he plays to his strengths on what's arguably his most consistent solo album to date. The gorgeous strings-led ballad *I'm Not Giving Up Tonight* is an elegant opener and *Dead To The World* is equally emotive. Meanwhile, the rolling grooves of *Pretty Boy* and the title track impress, there's a deft *Ashes To Ashes* vibe on *Think Of A Number* and we're loving the nod to *I Am The Resurrection* on *Love Is A Rich Man's* drums.

3 IT'S A MAN'S WORLD
CHER
Recently reissued is a reimagined 4LP deluxe edition vinyl boxset of Cher's 21st studio album. The original 14-track record has been remastered across two LPs plus there's a newly-compiled double album of 11 rare remixes. The set comes in four coloured vinyls and includes a Cher lithograph. The reissue will also be available digitally and as a 2CD set.

4 SEA OF MIRRORS / HOLY JOE'S CORAL ISLAND MEDICINE SHOW
THE CORAL
The Scouse fivepiece return with not one but two new studio albums in the autumn. *Sea Of Mirrors* arrives on 7 September, the follow-up to *Classic Pop* favourite, 2021's ambitious *Coral Island*. Frontman James Skelly reveals: "It's us asking ourselves: what would have happened if Lee Hazlewood had produced a Gene Pitney song written by Townes Van Zandt?" Released the same day on physical formats only, second album *Holy Joe's Coral Island Medicine Show* brings James and Ian Skelly's grandad aka The Great Muriarty back into the fold for the narrated postscript to one of the band's most successful albums to date.



5 ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE SPIDERS FROM MARS: THE MOTION PICTURE
DAVID BOWIE
Following on from the global cinema premiere of the digitally restored version of the iconic concert movie on 3 July, comes a full remastered soundtrack on 2CD and Blu-Ray, 2CD and 2LP limited edition gold vinyl. The audio incarnations are available to preorder now and will be released on 11 August.

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DEXYS
THE FEMININE DIVINE

100%

★★★★

HAVING MADE PEACE WITH HIS PAST, KEVIN ROWLAND TAKES HIS AUDIENCE SOMEWHERE COMPLETELY NEW ONCE AGAIN ON DEXYS' FOURTH RADICAL REINVENTION

Around the reissue of his controversial solo LP *My Beauty* in 2020, Kevin Rowland said he was done with making new music and that he had a fashion project in mind instead. Buoyed by realising that the world had caught up to the qualities of *My Beauty*, and with the right mix of *Too-Rye-Ay* finally readied last year, new ideas began to form after all – which chimed with some unfinished business.

This being Kevin Rowland, nothing is straightforward about what's only the fifth album of new music with the Dexys stamp. Part music hall, part synth-pop, part Usher-inflected R&B, *The Feminine Divine* is so wild that it makes *My Beauty* look as regular as Stereophonics. You might need a little lie-down after your first listen to try to figure out what exactly just happened.

But that was the reaction to *My Beauty* and *Don't Stand Me Down*, too. Take a beat, and these nine songs' place in Dexys' multi-faceted patchwork soon emerges. The starting point is Dexys' spoken-word songs, with the title track's call-and-response castigation of the young Rowland's attitude to women redolent of *Love Part 2*.

That at least plays out over timeless folk familiar from *Too-Rye-Ay*. It's when Rowland's passion leads to the flirtatious duet with Kamaria Castang on *Goddess Rules*' squelching Stevie Wonder-style keyboards that casuals might baulk. "I'm not convinced you're ready to surrender," Castang tells the amorous Rowland. "I want you to convince me."

She represents the listener, too, but persuasion arrives on the mighty *My Goddess Is*, a remarkable 21st century pop waltz like Tame Impala going Northern Soul. The opening trio of songs ease listeners in, the kind of euphoric old-school vaudeville showmanship only Kevin Rowland and his able Celtic Soul Brother trombonist Big Jim Paterson are capable of creating. They replicate the mood on *My Submission*, though its hymnal reverie is more aligned to *Don't Stand Me Down*'s gentlemanly stance.

By the final loverman croon of *Dance With Me*, over an adept mellow Gorillaz-aping bounce, Rowland has made a convincing case that he's on the side of the angels. Only the easygoing *The One That Loves You* is likely to bother Radio 2 playlisters.

For anyone who cares about intensity, or Dexys unearthing new moods after so long, their fifth album is frequently divine. Kevin Rowland? He still gets it. So should we. **John Earls**

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD
END OF WORLD

PIL OFFICIAL

★★★★

Having maintained the same line-up since reforming in 2009, John Lydon's best gang of miscreants each get to daub mischief all over this third album since their return.

End Of World was first previewed with its closing song *Hawaii*, put forward as a contender for Ireland's Eurovision entry. Too tasteful and restrained for Eurovision, its sweet "Hello there" refrain works better as valediction for Lydon's wife Nora,

who died shortly after the album was completed.

For anyone who thinks Lydon might be mellowing in his old age, fellow single and opening track *Penge* is more aligned with PiL's typically absurdist gestures, extravagantly theatrical rock matched by *North West Passage*.

More streamlined thrills arrive in the shape of *Car Chase* while *Being Stupid Again*'s propulsive dance music is worthy of *Open Up*. The latter's attack on pretentiousness will make the headlines, but don't let Lydon's sardonic cry of "All maths is racist!" be taken wholly at face value, nor overlook the mighty tune that carries the sloganeering.

The absurdity peaks on *The Do That*, a stream-of-consciousness list of rules that Lydon won't follow, set to vaudeville reminiscent of Yello. Similarly jazzy in hue, *Dirty Murky Delight* is a spoken-word treat, featuring Lydon at his most

uncomplicatedly hilarious. Throughout, his bandmates are equally gleeful, with Bruce Smith's drums on the album's other catcall against fads, *Pretty Awful*, sounding like a cosh against PiL's collective palm. Scott Firth's bass drives *Car Chase*'s late-night intoxication, while Lu Edmonds plays an excellent guitar hero in *End Of The World*.

All four Publicists particularly excel on the superb *Walls*, which is essentially a post-punk self-help treatise as Lydon strongly advises: "Acknowledge the walls that you find around you" over a claustrophobic groove that's the album's most overtly familiar nod to *Metal Box*.

"You know it ain't right," Lydon sings on *Dirty Murky Delight*. Maybe not, but for illicit thrills PiL are still hard to beat. **JE**

SOFT CELL
*HAPPINESS NOW EXTENDED

BMG

★★★★

Returning Soft Cell to the Top 10 for the first time since *The Art Of Falling Apart* 39 years earlier, 2022's **Happiness Not Included* was exactly the comeback that Marc Almond and Dave Ball deserved: the production sleek for the 21st century, the spirit as murky as the *Seedy Films* days.

The reasons it was such a good album are highlighted by two very different companion releases. A 2LP vinyl package has extended versions of all 12 tracks. It means the seamiest

song, the pulsating *This Last Night In Sodom* echo of *Nighthawks*, gets an overdue first vinyl release. Five of the mixes have featured on singles before, most notably Pet Shop Boys' transcendent *Purple Zone*, a homage to Neil and Chris' precursors who they spoke so fondly of in BBC2's recent *Reel Stories*.

The other mixes are kept in-house. None are as inventive as the legendary *Torch* 12", but *Bruises On My Illusions*' unsettling darkness is teased out and the bleepy *Polaroid* and its evocations of Warhol bounce even higher than the original.

Meanwhile, the CD edition is a terrific 19-track extravaganza. In addition to radio edits, a throbbing Chris & Cosey remix of *Nighthawks* and B-sides including a bright-eyed cover of X-Ray Spex's *The Day The World Turned Day Glo* are 10 songs that didn't make the original album. Forget notions of

© Andrew Whitton

discarded cig-ends (OK, *Defiant* is horribly twee), fans can now happily debate the perfect 12-track album from the original and these waifs and strays.

Jukebox Head is full-tilt Cell from the thrilling *Soul Inside* playbook, *Strange Kinda Dance* twitches with a restlessness far more timeless than its lockdown origins and the standout is *You Kill Me* where Almond and Ball gloriously decide they're a 50s girlgroup after all.

After 20 years apart, we'd already seen how in tune Soft Cell were straight away. Now we know just how prolific that reawakening was. The duo are working on more songs, you say? Let's see if the music industry can possibly keep up. **JE**

BLUR
THE BALLAD OF DARREN

PARLOPHONE

★★★★

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THEIR INITIAL REUNION 14 YEARS AGO, BLUR RETURN TO PROPERLY PLAN A NEW STUDIO ALBUM – AND IT'S A WORTHY ADDITION TO THEIR BACK CATALOGUE

When Blur's comeback album was announced in May, it came with the best and worst of the band. You might not have yet finished chortling at the album's risible title – but are equally unlikely to have stopped playing *The Narcissist*, Blur's most moving single since *Tender* back in the last century. (Yes, *13* really was 24 years ago. Sorry, everyone.)

The Narcissist is the blueprint for Blur's most cohesive album since, er, *Blur*. They've rubbed along just fine since first reforming in 2009 but Damon Albarn and Graham Coxon's restless exploration in their own projects hasn't allowed for diarising proper studio time to see what can result from their bonhomie until now.

The Magic Whip had its moments, but often resembled the hastily assembled scrapbook it started life as. *Think Tank* barely featured Coxon, so has a huge asterisk against it. Here, then, is the first chance to hear how Blur have grown into the older men they always resembled on *To The End* and *The Universal*.

Similar beauty arrives on *Goodbye Albert* and *Avalon*, the former a bittersweet plea for tolerance resembling Squeeze, the latter atypically confessional from Albarn, as he sings of never quite being able to find happiness among all his adventuring, over sumptuous horns and Coxon's guitar breaking hearts.

It's not all melancholia, as recent warm-up concerts proved by starting with the feisty *St Charles Square*. To a racket recalling *On Your Own*, Albarn's worries of something "living under the floorboards" are heightened by his bandmates recreating a cartoon punch-up behind him. A more controlled dynamism comes in the shape of *Barbaric*, a summery bop where Alex James and Dave Rowntree get to show off as indie's finest rhythm section once more.

There hasn't really been a Blur album like this before, with grace and tranquillity to the fore, an ease to their unity with enough unexpected moments to prevent them becoming staid.

It's not all perfect – *Russian Strings* is as perfunctory as its title and Coxon's acoustic guitar is so lovely on *The Everglades (For Leonard)* that everyone forgets to write a tune around it. However, you can forgive that on an album that ends with the majestic *The Heights*, which confidently suggests a ballad as beautiful as *No Distance Left To Run* is coming, especially when Albarn sings "This one's for you," before Coxon detonates skronking feedback all over the shop and it ends abruptly after just three minutes. Relaxed men of a certain age? Sure: but only to a point. **JE**

THE LILAC TIME
DANCE TILL ALL THE STARS COME DOWN

POETICA

★★★★½

Stephen Duffy's journey through pop music is a long, picaresque odyssey that touches Duran Duran, mid-80s chart success, Britpop and Robbie Williams.

Along the way, there's his on/off band The Lilac Time: an outfit which, even during their supposed peak in the late 80s, appeared out of time, serving up a kind of English pastoral pop that, despite critical plaudits and a major label record deal, was stubbornly unsuccessful – not one of their singles broke the Top 75.

Duffy seems to have poured all that life experience into this 12th album bearing their name, which is laden with hard-won wisdom and sighing 60-something regret. Its nearest comparison point is probably Richard Hawley's tender reflections on love.

But Duffy is far more pointed, with lyrics mixing quiet anger at the state of the world with typical candour about his own life. It's all acoustic, with his finger-picked guitar accompanied by just steel pedal and backing vocals, meaning it's impossible to ignore those words. *The Long Way* is a meditation on his long and winding career, accompanied by a sideswipe at the politicians responsible for Brexit ("Who votes for kindness to be destroyed?/ They offer just hatred, or suicide"). *A Makeshift Raft* is inspired by images of Syrian refugees and comes with the unexpected sound of Duffy yodelling.

Finally, there's *The Band That Nobody Knew*, a brutally honest look at a musician's life spent travelling down rock's byways. It's utterly heartbreaking. "What was the name of your band?/ What was the name of your song?/ Why did you think it went wrong?" Duffy intones, doubtless recounting a thousand conversations with fans and well-wishers down the years.

Except it hasn't gone wrong. Not this time. *Dance...* is a late career triumph that deserves to elevate Duffy to the elder statesman mantle his songwriting talent has long merited. There may be one more twist in his odyssey yet. **Beth Simpson**

GEORGIA
EUPHORIC

DOMINO

★★★½

© Will Spooner

Talking to *Classic Pop* about his comeback album *The Painter* last year, William Orbit raved about one of that record's collaborators: Georgia. Having worked on her own forthcoming LP in return, Orbit was convinced she was one of the most prodigious talents of her age, able to write, play and produce virtually anything.

As the daughter of Leftfield's Neil Barnes, Georgia had a head start, of course. But her previous album *Seeking Thrills* in 2020 slowly established her as a maverick pop talent both outside of her lineage and in an oasis separate from her peers.

A sleeper hit which outstripped its No.24 chart peak, it fitted between the route-one excitement of Dua Lipa and the determinedly esoteric glitchiness of Charli XCX. *Seeking Thrills* was escapism with heart, bangers with room to breathe. That ethos continues here, now with stellar help.

After self-producing *Seeking Thrills* and its less surefooted self-titled predecessor from 2015, Georgia wanted to see how she'd cope with a collaborator. Cue Rostam, the former Vampire Weekend multi-instrumentalist now established as producer for Carly Rae Jepsen and Haim.

Citing Orbit's production for Madonna and All Saints as *Euphoric*'s inspiration, his dreamy gliding style is most explicit on *Keep On*'s blissed-out mood. Orbit himself is only here playing bass on *Give It Up For Love*, a summery slice of Soul II Soul heatwave elevated by a shuffling guitar riff. More instant joys arrive on the giddy *Some Things You'll Never Know* and *Friends Will Never Let You Go*, Georgia's frenetic drumming adding further urgency to her dancefloor clarion call like a rave Karen Carpenter.

When the pace lessens the quality correspondingly dips slightly. *Mountain Song* and *Live Like We're Dancing Part II* forget to bring a memorable melody while album closer *So What* tries for hymnal but ends up purgatory. Those missteps are acceptable when surrounded by so much disco excitement. However, it prevents Georgia from building on her potential to make a true classic. **JE**

NIK KERSHAW, CAROL DECKER AND JOHNNY HATES JAZZ WITH THE ORCHESTRA OF OPERA NORTH
80s CLASSICAL VOLUME 1

CHERRY POP

★★½

As Pete Tong And The Heritage Orchestra's No.1 album, stadium shows and surprise appearance at King Charles' coronation bash proved, the pop-goes-classical makeover concept has firmly become part of the establishment.

Here, though, a collaboration between producers Steve Anderson and Cliff Masterson, the 50-strong Orchestra Of Opera North and a trio of *Classic Pop* favourites, *80s Classical* never fully commits to its concept. Indeed, whereas Tong and co are able to transform various Ibiza classics – often of the minimal one-man-and-his-machine variety – into elaborate, full-sounding mini-symphonies, many of these 13 tracks sound flatter than their source material.

However, there are a handful of interesting ideas on display. *China In Your Hand* leans further into the baroque pop promised by those opening plucked pizzicato strings, while the synth balladry of Nik Kershaw's *Human Racing* is turned into a sweeping torch song. But the orchestral element is regularly hampered by the kind of tinny synths and programmed drum beats that you'd expect from a karaoke instrumental.

The arbitrary song selections have a "Will this do?" vibe, too. While the singers each get at least a couple of chances to redo their biggest hits, there are also four anonymous covers that appear to have been plucked randomly from an 80s comp. Does anyone really need another generic rendition of *Africa* when Toto's superior original is so omnipresent on streaming?

A perfunctory remix of *Wouldn't It Be Good* tacked on at the end only fumbles the premise further.

Nik Kershaw and Carol Decker are appearing at the same-named live event at Leeds Millennium Square in July. You get the feeling this is how *80s Classical* is best experienced. **Jon O'Brien**

STEWART COPELAND
POLICE DERANGED FOR ORCHESTRA

BMG

★★★½

"Derangement" is Stewart Copeland's word to describe the drummer's method of pulling apart and rebuilding The Police's back catalogue for his recent series of live shows. It might also be a tacit acknowledgement of how gloriously bonkers the whole project – now parlayed into a studio album – often feels. Because, make no mistake, this is no standard orchestral makeover.

That much is obvious from the opening *Don't Stand So Close To Me*, as a slinky sax intro gives way to the full, sleazy glamour of a Bond theme. Which is kind of brilliant, but also kind of weird for a domestic drama set in a mundane world of school staffrooms and wet bus stops.

It sets the tone for an album in which blasting trumpets, fluting horns and swooning violin glissandos combine with Copeland's jazzy snares and crashing hi-hats – along with powerhouse vocals from Amy Keys, Carmel Helene and Ashley Tàmar – to reinvent the shuffling pop-reggae of *Roxanne*, *Message In A Bottle* et al as huge anthems destined to fill amphitheatres worldwide.

It's a formula that finds its ultimate expression on a giddy bells-and-whistles mash-up that fuses *Can't Stand Losing You* with the Grammy-winning instrumental title track of *Reggatta de Blanc* to create a sound as joyously infectious as it is… well, deranged. **Paul Kirkley**

KELLY CLARKSON
CHEMISTRY

ATLANTIC

★★★½

Having replaced Ellen DeGeneres as the queen of US daytime TV, Kelly Clarkson returns to what she does best for her 10th LP – and *Chemistry* would give any chatshow host plenty to discuss.

Indeed, ex-husband Brandon Blackstock's ears must have been burning throughout *Chemistry*'s recording. Lead single *Mine* is a slow-building revenge song which proves hell hath no fury like an *American Idol* winner scorned. Adding to Clarkson's arsenal of self-empowering anthems, *Rock Hudson* takes aim at a man pretending to be the perfect romantic lead. There's even a distinct Spaghetti Western showdown vibe to the opening whistles of *Red Flag Collector*. *Magic*, though, is a more optimistic ode to movie love, while *Favorite Kind Of High* is a sweet origins story which explains why this album was announced alongside an array of heartbreak, wine and sunshine emojis.

Sonically, *Chemistry* doesn't deviate much from the highly polished template of emotive ballads and defiant pop-rock stompers that's helped Clarkson transcend her talent show beginnings. Unlikely guest appearances from a banjo-playing Steve Martin (*I Hate Love*) and Sheila E (*That's Right*) are more intriguing on paper. Overall, though, it's a welcome reminder of the national treasure's former day job. **JO**

STEVE LUKATHER
BRIDGES

MASCOT

★★★½

Steve Lukather is the secret weapon behind countless pop and rock hits of the past 40-plus years. While associated mostly with his ambitious virtuoso band Toto – and for being part of the session crew on *Thriller* – the ace guitarist/songwriter has also played on albums by Stevie Nicks, Michael McDonald, Richard Marx and Rod Stewart, to name just a few.

Lukather's ninth solo album is also a collaborative affair. He co-wrote most of the record with his Toto bandmates Joseph Williams and David Paich. He also enlisted long-time friends such as singer-songwriter Randy Goodrum and ex-Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers drummer Stan Lynch to co-write other songs and teamed up with his eldest son Trev on the opening track, *Far From Over.*

The result is an eclectic effort featuring plenty of the expected guitar fireworks (the boogie-rock kiss-off *Not My Kind Of People*, the funky, groovy *Far From Over*) but one that also makes room for more introspective, expansive sounds (the seductive, traditional blues jam *Take My Love*, heartbroken, simmering ballad *All Forevers Must End*) that reveal vulnerability and tenderness. Best of all is *Someone*, a meditative track about being unable to shake a past love that resembles the yearning, early 80s prog-pop favoured by Rush and The Police. **Annie Zaleski**

JOHN MELLENCAMP
ORPHEUS DESCENDING

REPUBLIC

★★★

Partly named after the Greek god who was renowned for his superhuman musical prowess, *Orpheus Descending* is the 25th studio album release from John Mellencamp, the much-loved singer-songwriter who, in heartland rock circles at least, has pretty much reached deity status himself.

Luckily, the second half of the album's title isn't as apt. Indeed, just like last year's predecessor *Strictly A One-Eyed Jack*, these 11 tracks prove that the former "Cougar" is still as razor-sharp in his 70s as he was back in his *Jack And Diane* 80s commercial heyday.

The rousing slide guitar-led opener *Hey God* takes aim at America's refusal to deal with gun violence ("Laws written a long time ago/ No-one could imagine the sight/ Of so many dead on the floor"), while – inspired by an encounter with a homeless woman – the Springsteen-esque rocker *The Eyes Of Portland* rallies against those who believe that tears and prayers are the ultimate solution for society's woes.

Mellencamp's unapologetic cranky old man routine is exacerbated by a voice now so gruff he makes Tom Waits sound like Barry Gibb, particularly on solemn piano ballad *Understated Reverence* and the gentle blues of *Perfect World.*

It might not always be easy on the ear but, as always, Indiana's finest is still worth listening to. **JO**

THE HIVES
THE DEATH OF RANDY FITZSIMMONS

FUGA

★★★

With the fabulously named The Johan And Only replacing Dr Matt Destruction on bass, the Swedes finally return 11 years after previous album *Lex Hives.*

Showing an admirable determination to see a joke through, the title alludes to the band's fictitious mentor leaving behind a demo tape when disappearing/faking his death. In reality, singer Howlin' Pelle Almqvist's has a neat retort on why *TDORF* sounds exactly the same as all other Hives albums:

"There's no maturity or any of that bullshit, because who the fuck wants mature rock & roll?" That's the blessing and curse for these 12 songs. If you loved *Your New Favourite Band* in 2001, you'll gobble up the similarly ridiculous *Bogus Operandi* and *Rigor Mortis Radio*. But it's really only the properly Ramonesian high-octane punk of *The Bomb* and anarchic *Smoke And Mirrors* that add anything beyond their goofy grins and ability to craft *Hate To Say I Told You So* in 57 minutely different varieties.

Arctic Monkeys are impressed, making The Hives the main support band on their European tour. The resulting new generation will lap this up, and fair enough. But you can't help wondering what the band have done in the past decade, other than writing new chapters in the ongoing Fitzsimmons saga. Learning new tricks certainly hasn't been on the agenda. **JE**

RITA ORA
YOU AND I

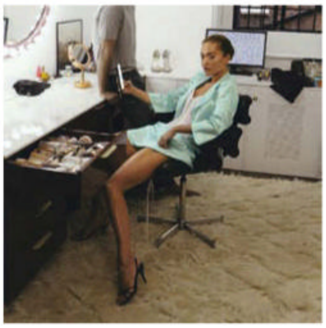
BMG

★★½

One of the regular complaints of us older pop fans around streaming is that it's halted the development of new music. Nobody wants to take any chances for fear of being left off those crucial Spotify playlists.

Even successful artists can end up being impaired by this conservatism. Take Rita Ora. *You And I* is only her third album in a decade, and purportedly her most personal yet.

Certainly, it finds her digging deeper lyrically – *That Girl* looks back at her hard-partying years when she was a gossip column regular, while both *Notting Hill* and *I Don't Wanna Be Your Friend* are filled with teenage memories of simpler times.



That's all well and good, but the music doesn't rise to the challenge. Most of the record follows preordained strictures: predictable chord changes, sudden endings, nothing over the three minute 15 seconds mark that might test the listener's attention span even slightly.

The upshot of that is little here sticks or stays in the memory, or goes beyond the merely adequate. That the highlight and lead single is a (sort of) cover of Fatboy Slim's two decade-old *Praise You* rather says it all.

Had form matched content, this could have been an album that shifted Ora up a division. As it is, *You And I* has to be viewed as a missed opportunity. **BS**

ANNE-MARIE
UNHEALTHY

ATLANTIC

★★★½

On her third album, Anne-Marie makes her intentions abundantly clear: "This ain't another sad girl anthem/ I'm heading down a different road." Accordingly, *The Voice* judge fantasises about revenge (*Grudge*), gets her life back on track after a breakup (*Trainwreck*) and toys with an ex's emotions (*Haunt You*). Musically, the album veers between ballads, theatrical numbers and pop, with a few curveballs: the string-adorned *Irish Goodbye*, Aitch collab *Psycho*, and the standout title track, a country-influenced Shania Twain duet. **AZ**

JUNGLE
VOLCANO

AWAL

★★★★

Quietly a big deal since 2014's Mercury nomination, *Volcano* expands the duo's sound to fit their bigger stages, mining the best disco and sweet-spot soul. *Candle Flame* is designed to boom out of soft-tops, while Channel Tres smooches the low-end joy of *I've Been In Love* and an award is due for getting Roots Manuva out of semi-retirement on *You Ain't No Celebrity*'s wonky wobbling dub. Boasting turn-of-the-century disco filters and electric piano glows, it's equally at home in clubs as on your headphones. **Ian Wade**

THE VIEW
EXORCISM OF YOUTH

COOKING VINYL

★★★★

The Dundee scamps' first album for eight years has been overshadowed by an on-stage fight which caused both their first comeback gigs to be scrapped. Thankfully, they kept it together in the studio with producer Youth long enough to turn in their most complete LP to date. *Feels Like* and *Shovel In His Hands* have the scrappy energy that sent *Same Jeans* huge, but they now also add vintage synth-pop, the wistful calm of singer Kyle Falconer's solo music, and an older gang mentality in anthemic glam chant *Allergic To Mornings*. **JE**

PENGUIN CAFÉ
RAIN BEFORE SEVEN

ERASED TAPES

★★★★

The most varied album in the careers of either the original Orchestra or their reboot, Arthur Jeffes' collective stop replicating his father's mischievous blueprint to change the Café menu in style. Gritty opener *Welcome To London* sets the tone for funk, arena anthemics, steel bands and, on *Find Your Feet*, techno worthy of Underworld. They've never sounded so ambitious as *Galahad*'s stirring drama, while *In Re Budd* sounds like The Police should if they ever reform again. A fine entry point for those new to the Jeffes' wild dynasty. **JE**

JOE McALINDEN
WHERE THE CLOUDS GO SWIMMING

STHQ

★★★

Joe McAlinden became a restauranteur in Loch Fyne after his Creation-signed band Superstar dissolved in 2000. He also had solo albums produced by Edwyn Collins and now makes ambient-washed ballads that might have flown around Superstar's split, nestling next to Turin Brakes and Doves.

Half of the eight tracks here last over five minutes, with *209* and *Wish* radiating a spectral calm. Although more raw energy would sometimes be nice, McAlinden's voice is as beatific as Green Gartside throughout. **JE**

DJANGO DJANGO
OFF PLANET

BECAUSE

★★★★

Reborn after 2021's middling *Glowing In The Dark*, album five really expands their horizons. Unlike the current vogue for calling half-baked demos a mixtape, these 21 tracks have the air of the best compilations. Standouts are longtime associate Self Esteem topping *Complete Me*'s vintage rave, Japanese rapper Yuuko going into battle with the Mory Kante vibe of *Don't Touch That Dial* and Jack Peñate reminding listeners why he should be far bigger than George Ezra on *No Time*. That it all stays exciting shows just how good the collective can be when in tune. **JE**

STEVEN JONES AND LOGAN SKY
SACRED FIGURES

ETRANGERS MUSIQUE

★★★★

Darkwave duo Steve Jones and Logan Sky became friends and musical collaborators via Steve Strange. The pair's sixth LP does the Visage great's legacy justice, and brims with moody synth-pop as well as swooning gothic lyrics that would make Edgar Allan Poe proud (or jealous). Particularly compelling is the greyscale gloom of *This Silence, Our Tragedy*, a languid composition featuring melancholy sax from Gary Barnacle, the haunted-house-creepy cinematic vibe of *Radiation* and *Scary Monsters*-era Bowie nod of *Into Dust*. **AZ**

GIRL RAY
PRESTIGE

MOSHI MOSHI

★★★★

'Going disco' has been a well-worn route for indie bands ever since New Order first switched on a sequencer, but what's impressive about this North London trio's third LP is the attention to detail. Poppy Hankin has Nile Rodgers' choppy guitar style down pat, Iris McConnell's hi-hat is constantly fizzing, while strings and keyboard shadings embellish *Up* and infectious single *Everyone's Saying That*. Producer Ben Allen adds some of disco's warmth and lightness, so *Prestige* is redolent of long European evenings, rich with romance and possibility. **BS**

© Brian Aris

FUN BOY THREE
THE COMPLETE

CHRYSALIS

★★★★★

THE SPECIALS WERE HUGELY IMPORTANT BUT, WHILE THEY MAY NOT HAVE MAINTAINED THE PLAUDITS, SO WERE THE BAND FORMED BY THREE OF THEIR DEPARTING MEMBERS

The first retrospective release of Terry Hall since his heartbreaking death last year, this boxset of his second band had been planned a year before he fell ill. Too lovingly assembled to be exploitative, its release was delayed to prevent cash-in accusations, and rightly so: on its own terms, *The Complete* highlights just what a beguilingly strange crew Hall, Lynval Golding and Neville Staple were in The Specials' aftermath.

To declare an interest: I wrote the boxset's sleevenotes with Staple and Golding weeks before Hall's illness. While jokes have been made for 41 years over such a superficially dour band being called Fun Boy Three, Golding explains the name really was that straightforward: with Jerry Dammers being intensely un-fun 24/7, the trio decided that they could do with a laugh, thanks.

In truth, you would have to be a fool not to recognise the humour in Fun Boy Three. Not only did they propel the fun-defining Bananarama into orbit via *T'Aint What You Do*, even when they were creating social commentary in the *Ghost Town* class writing about Northern Ireland on *The More I See (The Less I Believe)*, Terry Hall's frustrations were brilliantly summarised by sighing "Does anybody know any jokes?" at the end.

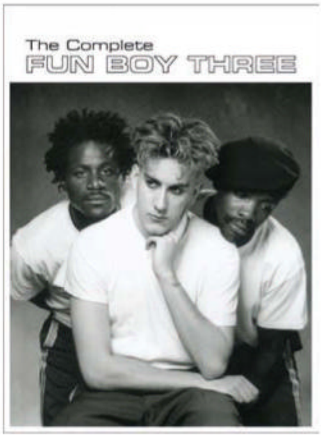
That playfulness is ever present on their self-titled debut album, an astonishing masterpiece that remains unique. Many bands have tried to capture The Specials' ska, but decades on nobody has dared attempt to follow a succession of pop songs wholly built on vocal interplay and percussion. *I Don't Believe It* has a Hitchcockian murderous intent in its claustrophobic waltz, while *Faith, Hope And Charity* is equally a plea for tolerance and gleefully nonsensical chant, as they inform us: "Babies come from ladies!"

After standalone singles including a joyfully rhythmic take on George Gershwin's iconic *Summertime*, the only way to get stranger than the debut was to hire David Byrne as producer for its follow-up. *Waiting* was more musically layered but kept the humour, *We're Having All The Fun* describing the trio's love of the small things as Golding proclaimed: "I like digging up my garden" over a superficially morose groove.

That added instrumentation made it easier to tour, the live songs showing the larks also made it to the stage and the extended versions usually keep the fun going, too. Hall's sudden disbanding of the trio is still a mystery, particularly to Staple, but it means they never made a bad record.

Complete with the expected rarities plus unreleased songs – including the demo of *Why*, made *before* it became a Specials B-side – here's one of the era's greatest alternative pop bands.

Important, deep, innovative and above all fun. **John Earls**



ABC
THE LEXICON OF LOVE

UMC/NEUTRON

★★★★½

Missing its own 40th anniversary by a year, one of the best albums humanity has ever been gifted with gets a vinyl-only boxset that's a chance to reassess just how good *The Lexicon Of Love* is.

Let's be honest, if you've ever picked up a single issue of *Classic Pop*, you already know ABC's debut is one of the greats. All nine full songs are instantly familiar, perfectly chiselled headrushes. ABC's songwriting and Trevor Horn's production working together in literally perfect harmony, Anne Dudley's incredible feat of having *this* as the first album on her orchestral arrangement CV… it's such a constant since 1982 that it's most tempting to try to spot the flaws. So, er, um: The "Love has no guarantee" vocals in *Date Stamp* are maybe a tiny bit overegged?

In surrounding such a classic, Universal needed to live up to the brilliant job they did with Dexys' *Too-Rye-Ay* last year to bring true additional context. The compilers haven't quite done that – there's little that hasn't been on previous deluxe reissues, with commonplace bootlegs like Martin Fry singing *4 Ever 2 Gether* in the style of Ken Dodd remaining in the vaults.

© Getty

But it's a solid job of rounding up those old extras, the star turn being a vintage live album from Hammersmith Odeon where Fry, Mark White and co seem determined to prove it wasn't *only* Horn who brought the magic. They succeed admirably.

The extras' highlight is the Blu-Ray, featuring the first release of their unwieldy film *Mantrap* since its VHS in 1983. Director Julien Temple's story is still utter nonsense, of course, but it's a rather nice curio from a time when bands celebrated their success with ambition.

The Blu-Ray also houses Steven Wilson's new 5.1 version, where the king of surround sound mixes finally gets to work on his favourite studio album and makes it even swooshier.

Not quite a definitive boxset, but it makes a classic a little bit better. Many happy returns. **JE**

PET SHOP BOYS
SMASH: THE SINGLES 1985-2020

PARLOPHONE

★★★★★

When *Classic Pop* first heard that a new Pet Shop Boys singles compilation was planned, the office went nervous. *Discography* and *PopArt* are classics of the genre; their previous Best Of set *Ultimate* in 2010 was conversely an overly condensed muddle.

Since we learned of the tracklisting of PSB Singles 4.0, joy has been unconfined. As explained by Chris Lowe in our previous issue, firstly *SMASH* is a title worthy of pop's most erudite turn, encapsulating *Smash Hits*, Roy Lichtenstein and hit songs (and thus PSB's own *Hit Music*.)

At a time when many two-bob punk bands demand their name is all-caps, Lowe and Neil Tennant are justified in *SMASH*'s shouty title. THIS is quite possibly the finest singles compilation there ever was. Bow down before it and acknowledge that *Domino Dancing* should have been a bigger hit at the time, unworthy peasant.

SMASH keeps matters mostly simple: the main 3CD/6LP/triple-cassette edition is all 54 of the duo's singles from *West End Girls* to *I Don't Wanna* in chronological order.

Possibly the only mainstream act to still routinely release physical singles (and B-sides), Pet Shop Boys' passion for the format hasn't waned a jot since they were kicking in chairs and knocking down tables.

Even if their parent album was experimenting with their softer,

hard dance or L.A. side, the singles are routinely perfect pop.

Monkey Business, *The Pop Kids*, *Vocal*, *Love Is A Bourgeois Construct*: only that they've been around for so long prevents PSB's recent stuff from storming the barricades as effectively as *It's A Sin* or *Being Boring*.

The 3CD+2Blu-Ray format addresses the "What even is a single now?" question by adding 13 more sort-of singles, also wondrous (OK, OK, maybe not *Burning The Heather*.) The second Blu-Ray contains the videos for all the main singles.

Part of a proper single package is a great video. There are all kinds of superb promos there. If you've lost your way with PSB since *Yes*, you're a clot. But you're also a clot who's in for a treat. *What* a compilation. **JE**

© Getty

WHAM!
THE SINGLES: ECHOES FROM THE EDGE OF HEAVEN

SONY

★★★★½

ALONGSIDE WHAM!'S NETFLIX DOCUMENTARY, A SINGLES BOXSET AND HIGHLIGHTS PACKAGE IS A CHANCE TO REVEL IN HOW WELL THIS CELEBRATION OF FRIENDSHIP HAS AGED

As Andrew Ridgeley movingly explains earlier in this issue, Wham! couldn't have lasted much longer than a few albums because George Michael could never truly be himself in the band.

While discovering his sexuality, Michael was writing songs for an audience rather than exploring his personality: his most lyrically personal song in Wham!, *Nothing Looks The Same In The Light*, wasn't a single. Still, as an early blossoming of that incredible talent, the 10 songs that did become Wham! singles remain, well, fantastic. As well as co-writing *Wham! Rap* and *Club Tropicana*, it's easy to spot Ridgeley's role. Not only was he the driving force in Michael becoming a musician in the first place, Ridgeley gave his best friend the security to make the transformation from Georgios Panayiotou into George Michael as fully realised a confident, teasing pop star he and the public needed.

Wham! Rap is redolent of its time, both in the relatively confrontational lyrics and vocals, gauche by Michael's standards. *Bad Boys* was heavy handed, though its tune soars, but in between *Young Guns* was the perfect realisation of the hedonism that the duo wanted coupled with the social commentary early label mentor Mark Dean requested.

Club Tropicana was the first instance of Wham! in their truly escapist form. Once that flew, the duo were free to rattle off a procession of pop/soul triumphs so good it was frankly rude to anyone else trying to create songs as bulletproof as *I'm Your Man*, *Freedom* and *Last Christmas*. *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go* is more intricate than anything Radiohead have ever created *and* it's got a proper chorus.

With Ridgeley fed up by the limelight and Michael wanting to be more himself, it couldn't last. *The Edge Of Heaven* was a brilliant send-off. True to their word, there were no encores.

The vinyl boxset boasts memorabilia including a book and keyring, while the 10CD adds virtually all the mixes, though a point off for not being fully comprehensive: the extended version of *Going For It* and the live take on *Blue* might have stopped some complaints.

In truth, the mixes that do feature are less essential than their perfectly distilled single versions, generally excuses for Michael to hone his studio technique rather than true floorfillers. The 2LP/1CD editions, each with a bonus handful of mixes, are enough for most fans in superseding 1986's *The Final*.

In quitting at the right time, Wham! remain the blueprint for how to celebrate coming-of-age friendship. We all might be older now but, 40 years on from *Fantastic*, their spirit remains young and joyous. **JE**

DAVID SYLVIAN
DO YOU KNOW ME NOW? SAMADHISOUND 2003-2014

UMC/SAMADHISOUND

★★★½

© Getty

It may surprise some that David Sylvian released *any* music after leaving Virgin, let alone enough over a decade on his own label for this lavish 10CD set. Having secured his freedom, however, Japan's former singer frequently pursued the path least trodden, retreating from *TOTP*'s bright lights into the avant-garde.

Still, Sylvian understood what he was doing, and *Blemish* from 2003 was only released physically after online sales advocated wider availability. Sylvian's distinctive voice remains velveteen on this cathartic document of his marriage breakup, but its dense melodies hover over amorphous soundscapes and trip over broken musical skeletons.

Little on remixes album *The Good Son Vs. The Only Daughter* is more accessible – nor, indeed, on Grönland's recent ethereal *Wandermüde*, where Stephan Mathieu remoulds its tracks – and things get even more challenging elsewhere. 2007's *When Loud Weather Buffeted Naoshima* provides a 70-minute soundtrack for a Japanese exhibition – perhaps you had to be there – and if 2009's *Manafon* offers songs, their vocals can often seem rather divorced from their accompaniment.

This, nonetheless, like enough of these sometimes seemingly impenetrable recordings, displays a brittle beauty, arguably enhanced on 2011's *Manafon Variations*, with Dai Fujikura remixing six tracks and arranging new ones, strings ever prominent. But 18-minute companion disc *When We Return You Won't Recognise Us* (another Fujikura "co-write"), is especially arcane, while another art installation score, 2012's *Uncommon Deities*, and 2014's *There's A Light...* place greatest emphasis on spoken word.

Sylvian's low profile, then, is understandable, but tucked away are two discs, including remixes, of his luxurious Nine Horses project with Steve Jansen and Burnt Friedman. 2005's majestic duet with Stina Nordenstam, *Wonderful World*, provides an inadvertent reminder of his earlier, approachable work, but if Sylvian is often unfathomable, he can still be seductive, whatever shape his music does – or doesn't – take. **Wyndham Wallace**

TALKING HEADS
STOP MAKING SENSE

RHINO

★★★★

© Getty

Alongside its 4K restoration in cinemas, the complete 18-song *Stop Making Sense* concert has now been released on audio for the first time. That's on a fabulously packaged 2LP set, which adds a 28-page booklet with new sleevenotes by all four Talking Heads. In those, Chris Frantz talks of the show's "real, conscious, transcendent joy," which is evident even without the visuals.

Routinely and rightly hailed as one of the greatest concert films of all time, its frantic celebration does perhaps lose the subtleties of the studio versions while everyone tries to keep up with each other, including great sessioners like keyboardist Bernie Worrell. The film is even more of a highwire act until David Byrne puts on his big suit; on vinyl, you occasionally want to draw breath.

But that's to quibble at what a fantastic live band Talking Heads were. As well as being studio masters, they were able to take any audience with them. Have *Once In A Lifetime* or *Girlfriend Is Better* ever sounded so full of wonder?

The two previously unreleased songs, *Cities* and – from Byrne's solo album *The Catherine Wheel* – *Big Business*, only extend the party mood here, presumably dropped before solely for space rather than quality reasons.

Tom Tom Club's *Genius Of Love* also works as a Heads song, Tina Weymouth's bassline frenetic but no more so than on then-current hit *Burning Down The House*.

Byrne's intricately detailed *American Utopia* tour proved that he can still create a live spectacle. But, hearing Frantz and Weymouth's rhythm section groove so insouciantly on *Take Me To The River*, you'd be justified at wondering yet again if he can stop sniping about his former bandmates long enough for one more tour.

Maybe even Byrne, Weymouth, Frantz and Jerry Harrison couldn't play with this much vigour if that reunion ever happened. Precious few young bands can, after all.

So why not delight that the world got to witness Talking Heads pull off such a show at all. Head to your local cinema, then relive it all over again at home. There's enough magic to keep us all going here, now complete at last. **JE**

© Getty

NOW

NOW MILLENNIUM 00-01/ NOW 12" 80s: 1980 NOW YEARBOOK 1978 EXTRA/ NOW YEARBOOK 1992/ NOW ALTERNATIVE 80s

NOW

★★★★ / ★★★★★ / ★★★★ / ★★★★★ / ★★★★★

WE'RE SKIPPING BETWEEN MULTIPLE DECADES AND GENRES FOR THE LATEST FIVE RELEASES FROM THE NOW LABEL

NOW's pop TARDIS romps dizzyingly around the years this month. Picking up from when it was last seen in 1999, the *Millennium* Series returns by combining 2000 and 2001. Although not generally remembered as essential years, this 83-track 4CD (or 30-song 2LP) highlights a point when pop was having a moment with Britney, S Club 7, Robbie and Kylie, while the dancefloor was still setting the agenda chartwise via Madison Avenue, Rui Da Silva and Sonique.

The variety of the time is brought home in the first chart glimmers of Coldplay, P!nk and Dido, as well as one-off hits that briefly made stars out of Andreas Johnson and Len – hurray! – and The Bloodhound Gang – boo!

Whizzing back two decades, there's what looks like becoming an incredible NOW sub-series with *NOW 12" 80s: 1980*. The previous sprinkling of *80s 12"* collections were superb, but this 4CD 45-track set implies NOW is about to go deep year on year, with an array of full-length disco delights such as Change's *Searching* and Crown Heights Affair's *You Gave Me Love*, as well as pop's early grapplings with the reswizzle of Blondie's *Call Me* and Spandau.

Regular NOWers know the drill: if there's a *Yearbook*, there's going to be a *Yearbook Extra*, and 1978's 66-track 3CD companion doesn't disappoint with crackers by the usual eclectic mix somehow finding a comfortable home together. This time, it's PiL, Patrick Juvet, Hi-Tension, Musique and Raydio.

The yearbooks have done a stellar job of collating popular songs from 1978-86, so is it 1977 or '87 next? It's... 1992. Again, the pre-Britpop period isn't anyone's obvious pick for a 79-track 4CD/43-track 3LP. But *Now Yearbook 1992* charts a wild time when grunge swept away the rave debris, single sales were at an all-time low and The KLF split up. Meanwhile, 1992 also saw an impossible to categorise mix of *Ebeneezer Goode*, *Would I Lie To You*, Shakespears Sister, Jimmy Nail and Tamsin Archer all topping the charts, plus Manic Street Preachers, Suede and Take That making their Top 20 debuts. The old(ish) guard were still strong with U2, Erasure, Bon Jovi and The Cure. All that and 1992's biggest hit in *I Will Always Love You* are present and correct.

Precious few big-name indie compilations have dug as deep as *NOW Alternative 80s*. Across an 80-track 4CD/30-track 2LP, there are nuggets including Zaine Griff's Kate Bush-assisted *Flowers*, Sandii & The Sunsetz' *Dreams Of Immigrants*, Act's *Snobbery & Decay* and Scritti Politti's *The Sweetest Girl*. This must also be the first NOW appearance for Pixies, The Sisters Of Mercy, Wall Of Voodoo and even Anne Pigalle. Darkly magical. **Ian Wade**

LANDSCAPE
LANDSCAPE A GO-GO

COOKING VINYL

★★★½

Casual music fans will associate Landscape with two 1981 hits: the pogoing *Einstein A Go-Go* and Numan-esque *Norman Bates*. However, this 5CD set underscores how the London quintet fronted by Spandau Ballet/Kim Wilde producer Richard James Burgess are much more serious than those early singles let on.

Bolstered by 22 previously-unissued tracks, this compilation traces their history via expanded versions of the band's first three albums, plus two more discs crammed full of self-released EPs, single edits, extended versions, remixes and B-sides.

Landscape initially favoured keyboard-driven instrumental jazz-funk, an approach that's illuminated by a red-hot selection of little-heard live tracks recorded in the late 70s. These end up as this collection's highlights, with the ominous, avant-garde *Watt Is Knott* and funky, discofied *Kaptin Whorlix* especially connecting. But even when the band embraced more conventional forms, such as synth-pop, their innate drive to challenge themselves never waned.

Listened to straight through, the collection can feel a little overwhelming. But absorbed in small doses, this is a dynamite way to rediscover a band that has a rich catalogue to explore. **Annie Zaleski**

PAUL HARDCASTLE
NINETEEN AND BEYOND: 1984-1988

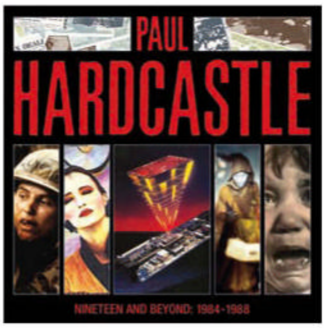
CHRYSALIS

★★★½

Since his 80s chart heyday, Paul Hardcastle has become a prolific smooth jazz star with more than 35 specialist No.1 singles and 20 million global CD sales. However, the Londoner is still associated for his synth-leaning hits – notably Vietnam War critique *19*, R&B-influenced *Don't Waste My Time*, and burbling *TOTP* theme *The Wizard*.

This 4CD compilation is squarely focused on his more mainstream days, in particular from his time on Chrysalis. That equates to remastered versions of two studio albums (his 1985 self-titled LP and 1988's *No Winners*) and two discs of rare mixes and B-sides. Although the collection contains plenty of variations on well-known tunes, it shines even more when highlighting the breadth and depth of Hardcastle's strengths. His acumen for electro-funk is on display throughout, such as the cartoonishly spooky *The Asylum (It'z Weird)* and propulsive instrumental *Loitering With Intent*, while an extended mix of the apocalypse-fearing *40 Years* resembles Public Enemy in the way it combines hip-hop and electric guitars.

Moreover, songs like the lilting *King Tut (US Remix)* as well as the ultra-sleek *The Wizard (Jazz Mix)* seamlessly connect the dots between Hardcastle's pop and jazz careers. **AZ**



DEAD OR ALIVE
LET THEM DRAG MY SOUL AWAY

CHERRY RED

★★★★

Those only aware of Dead Or Alive through their shiny SAW years could be forgiven for thinking a 3CD set from their 1979-82 beginnings is honouring an entirely different band. In fairness, it partly is, with nine of its 48 songs hailing from the short-lived Nightmares In Wax, the proto-goth outfit that first unleashed Pete Burns onto an unsuspecting public.

A demo of the previously unreleased *I'll Turn Away*, a gloriously atmospheric post-punk number worthy of a place on NIW's sole 1980 EP *Birth Of A Nation*, will hold the most interest for more dedicated fans. Early singles including The Doors-esque debut *I'm Falling* and *It's Been Hours Now* show Wayne Hussey's brooding guitar skills were just as integral to Dead Or Alive's original sound as Burns' howling tones.

Meanwhile, primitive versions of minor hits *Misty Circles* and *What I Want* as well as a trio of untitled instrumentals offer a glimpse into the making of 1984 debut *Sophisticated Boom Boom*.

This comprehensive origins story also throws in all eight tracks from DOA's two John Peel sessions, with *Running Wild* a particular highlight, and a first official outing, albeit a slightly muffled live one, for *Gilded Splinters*. Proof, if any were needed, that Dead Or Alive were thriving long before being spun right round. **Jon O'Brien**

BAD MANNERS
THE SINGLES 1980-89

PRESSURE DROP

★★★★

Four UK Top 10 hits in a total of nine Top 40 entries: it's fair to say Bad Manners were one of the most ubiquitous bands of the early 80s, but who talks about them now? Unjustly forgotten, while their 2-Tone associated peers – The Selecter, Madness, The Specials – are feted and celebrated, Bad Manners seem to have been struck from the cultural conversation. This 3CD set, then, is a chance to reacquaint yourself with their unruly, impish brand of ska.

Debuting in 1980 with an infectiously frisky cover of Dicky Doo And The Don'ts' 1958 novelty hit *Nee Nee Na Na Na Na Nu Nu*, Buster Bloodvessel and chums followed it with a string of similarly rambunctious 45s, including the No.15-charting single *Lip Up Fatty*, the insanely catchy *Special Brew* (the closest that Bad Manners ever got to a love song) and, of course, their saucy, Hammond organ-powered version of *Can Can*.

With covers drawn from as far afield as French opera (the aforementioned *Can Can*), 60s bubblegum (*My Girl Lollipop*) and swing (*Gonna Get Along Without Ya Now*) plus almost uniformly snappy originals – *Skaville UK* especially deserved to be bigger – Bad Manners were one of the least predictable of the 80s ska outfits. Forty years on from their chart pomp, it's time for a reappraisal. **Steve O'Brien**

ARTHUR BAKER PRESENTS
DANCE MASTERS VOL 2

DEMON

★★★★

After his previous *Dance Masters* compilation focused on Shep Pettibone, Arthur Baker assembles 43 of his own remixes across a 4CD or 6LP set, with a 13-track 2LP for the casuals.

Baker is obviously worthy of such an extensive document. Indeed, a standout is his own cult classic *The Message Is Love*, where he persuaded Al Green to get sweet in the studio again. Green is one of several unlikely names here, with Baker versatile enough to sprinkle funk over Terry Hall, Fleetwood Mac and even Bob Dylan. A pioneer in remixing mainstream and rock names, Baker was adept at keeping the essence of whoever he worked with, enhancing the cabaret of The Cars in *Hello Again* and letting *Out Of Touch* glide for longer for Hall & Oates.

The collage of stereotypically 80s effects dominating *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* is a rare mistake, but at least Baker was one of the producers to invent them, as CD4's opener *Planet Rock* serves notice. That's the most straight-up club disc, with Central Line's *Surprise, Surprise* given extra percussive back-up for its chanting stridency.

A third volume is due soon, and Baker continues to DJ. Current talent would be wise to take notice of what he can bring to a remix, too. **JE**

DANNII MINOGUE
NEON NIGHTS

LONDON

★★★★

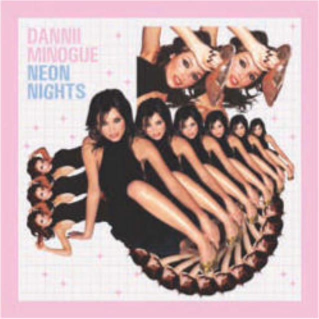
Six years after she released her previous studio album, 1997's *Girl*, Dannii Minogue finally returned to pop duty with a selection of turn-of-the-century flavoured dancefloor bangers in the form of the marvellous *Neon Nights*.

To celebrate the record's 20th anniversary, it's been given a massive expansion: you can now choose from a 2CD set, picture disc and a whopping 7CD box containing more than 100 tracks, with no end of remixes such as the stellar *Begin To Spin Me Round* which mashes together *I Begin To Wonder* with – as you may have guessed – *(You Spin Me Round) Like A Record*.

Working with producers including Korpi, Dutch duo Riva and Blackcell, Jewels & Stone, as well as longtime collaborator and pop mastermind Ian Masterson, *Neon Nights* was precision-tooled to impact as hard as possible from styles that were then in vogue.

Dannii's most consistent and biggest-selling LP, *Neon Nights* belongs in the orbit of Kylie's *Fever*, Madonna's *Confessions On A Dancefloor* and Rachel Stevens' *Come And Get It*.

Casuals will love the 2CD edition, while the quality across the 7CD boxset makes *Neon Nights*' case as one of the great disco-facing pop albums of the 21st century. **IW**



GIRLS ALOUD
SOUND OF THE UNDERGROUND

UMC/POLYDOR

★★★★

Long overdue some catalogue attention, the first Girls Aloud album gets a handsome 3CD expanded edition for its 20th anniversary, alongside its first appearance on vinyl.

If their debut wasn't quite at the level of *Chemistry* or *What Will The Neighbours Say?* for noughties pop perfection, the deluxe set shows that, from the off, there was more to Girls Aloud than just their mighty singles like the title track and *No Good Advice*.

Far stronger than Spice Girls hits-and-filler, half of the album is Xenomania establishing their stronghold, with *Love/Hate* a tense garage titan and *Mars Attack* perfectly inhabiting the cartoon kitsch landscape of its writer/producer team, Betty Boo and The Beatmasters.

Arriving when CD B-sides were still essential, there are some terrific additions on CD2. Nobody needs their *Girls On Film* or *Grease* covers, but *On A Round* is a punishing military workout and *Sacred Trust* a phones-aloft sweeping ballad. CD3 focuses on remixes, with Almighty doing their usual reliable work and Dreadzone's echoey *No Good Advice* letting the vocals breathe on top of stripped-back percussion.

Hopefully this will prove the formula for Girls Aloud's other four albums in showing what a kitemark for pop alchemy they were for five years. **JE**

THE SOUND
THE STATIK RECORDS YEARS

DEMON

★★★★

Combining Joy Division's literate intensity, the Bunnymen's drama and Simple Minds' early anthemic qualities, The Sound should have been irresistible to the post-punk crowd. However, by the time they arrived at indie Statik Records, three major label LPs had failed to convert critical acclaim to commercial success.

Shock Of Daylight, this 5CD set's opening mini-album from 1984, should have corrected that: *Golden Soldiers* was as in-yer-face as The Stranglers' *No More Heroes*, while *New Way Of Life* boasted unusual optimism and *Winter* satisfied its title.

Heads And Hearts (1985) was similarly arresting, launching with the ferocious *Whirlpool* and thrilling with *Restless Time*, while *Burning Part Of Me* sparkled in the rain and *One Thousand Reasons* proved it wasn't all doom and gloom. 1986's double live LP *In The Hothouse* underlined the band's fiery stage demeanour, too, with Adrian Borland unstoppable on *Winning*, while *Wildest Dreams* demonstrated dynamic force before *Missiles*' explosive finale.

Sales, though, still eluded the Londoners. Then Statik went bankrupt. Fortunately, their archives offer two further discs: a gritty demos collection, *New Way Of Life* – also out on vinyl – and *Blood And Poison*, whose gripping *Through And Through* and repressed *Reduced To Danger* are both unreleased. **WW**

NOW 80s ALTERNATIVE
4CD / 2LP / 16.06.23
EURYTHMICS, THE SMITHS, MARC ALMOND, DAVID SYLVIAN, THE SUGARCUBES, PIXIES, R.E.M.
THE CURE, PROPAGANDA, THE ASSOCIATES, YELLO, SISTERS OF MERCY, THE ADVENTURES
THE CLASH, DEVO, SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES, BAUHAUS, THE PASSIONS, THE B-52'S

NOW 12" 80s 1980
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BLONDIE, DONNA SUMMER, DIANA ROSS, LIPPS INC., LIQUID GOLD
ODYSSEY, CHANGE, LOLEATTA HOLLOWAY, SPARKS, GRACE JONES
ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK, SPANDAU BALLET

© Getty

PETER GABRIEL
WALDBÜHNE, BERLIN

26 MAY

★★★★

WITH A NEW ALBUM IMMINENT, THE MERCURIAL MULTIMEDIA MAESTRO RETURNS TO THE BIG TIME, THRILLING A VAST CROWD. "THIS IS THE NEW STUFF/ WE GO DANCING IN..."

It's been just short of a decade since Peter Gabriel last toured, and over two since his last album of new songs, 2002's *Up* – 2010's *Scratch My Back* consisted of cover versions, and the following year's *New Blood* orchestral versions of his own compositions.

A return to the stage, therefore, especially promoting a new but as yet unreleased studio album, is freighted with expectations: will the new songs hold up, will he deliver the hits, and will he, as an often boldly experimental pop star, dig deeper into his catalogue as an artistic statement, rewarding his most loyal fans at the expense of familiar choruses?

Well, this is Peter Gabriel, so he's definitely going to do it his way. Divided into two sets, the show's heavy on new material, with about half of the 23 songs in this well over two-hour performance taken from the upcoming *i/o*, though a fair few have now seen release and aren't entirely unfamiliar.

It's a lot to ask of an audience, but Gabriel is a persuasive salesman: the title track's hook is as effective as any, while *And Still*, dedicated to his mother, is, in stark contrast, movingly poised. *Olive Tree* is an unexpectedly perky 80s throwback, though its brass is thankfully real, while *Road To Joy*'s upbeat funk sends half the band – Tony Levin on Chapman Stick, birthday boy Richard Evans on keytar and David Rhodes on guitar – to the front of the stage for a little synchronised dancing while Gabriel prowls around them like an elegantly jacketed headmaster. You've got to admire his tailor as much as his songwriting chops.

Giving people what they want is also on the agenda, whether opening with his 1977 debut album's *Here Comes The Flood* – in German, no less – or banging out multiple songs from *So*, which, let's face it, is why half the crowd is here.

A riotous *Sledgehammer* provides the first half's finale, and a muscular *Red Rain* brings out the best in drummer Manu Katché, while late highlight *Big Time* is so big it's a mystery why it doesn't close the show, especially since *In Your Eyes* provides an unusually subdued first encore.

The second half, meanwhile, begins with a dramatic, moody *Darkness* from *Up* and a glorious *Solsbury Hill*, his debut single and probably the first song with a complicated time signature any of us ever truly loved, ends it.

It's a testament to Gabriel's skills that he treads this tightrope so successfully between testing our patience and titillating us with new tunes while also accommodating those who yearn for the chart favourites and others who want to celebrate his work's breadth. In fact, the night's only significant misstep comes with *Don't Give Up*, which, in Kate Bush's absence, can't help but slide towards the mawkish territory of Streisand and Diamond's *You Don't Bring Me Flowers*, despite cellist Ayanna Witter-Johnson's efforts.

No one really cares, though. It's been a sentimental reunion, and we depart with *Biko*'s chants of freedom ringing in our ears as heartily as *i/o*'s. The weight of expectation's been worthwhile.

Wyndham Wallace

SETLIST

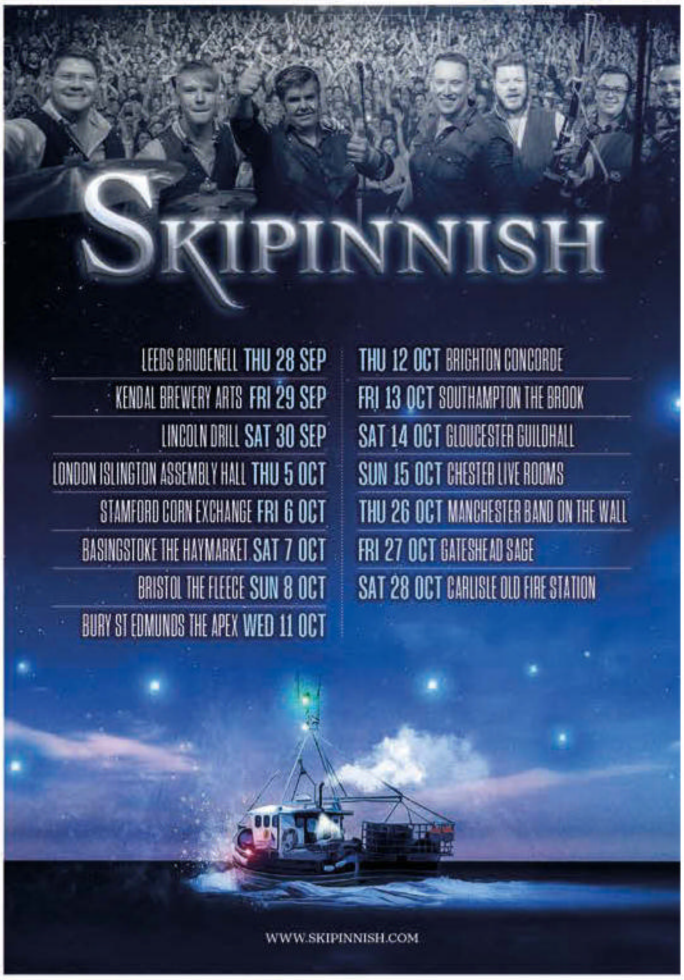
SET 1:
1. Here Comes The Flood (German version)
2. Growing Up
3. Panopticom
4. Four Kinds Of Horses
5. i/o
6. Digging In The Dirt
7. Playing For Time
8. Olive Tree
9. This Is Home
10. Sledgehammer

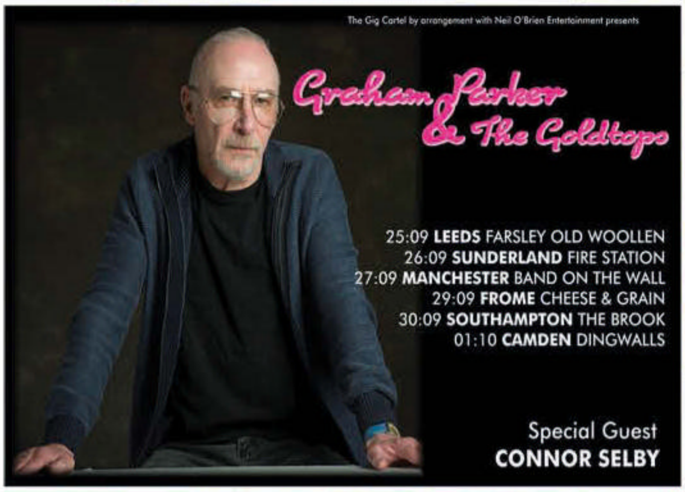
SET 2:
11. Darkness
12. Love Can Heal
13. Road To Joy
14. Don't Give Up
15. The Court
16. Red Rain
17. And Still
18. Big Time
19. Live And Let Live
20. Solsbury Hill

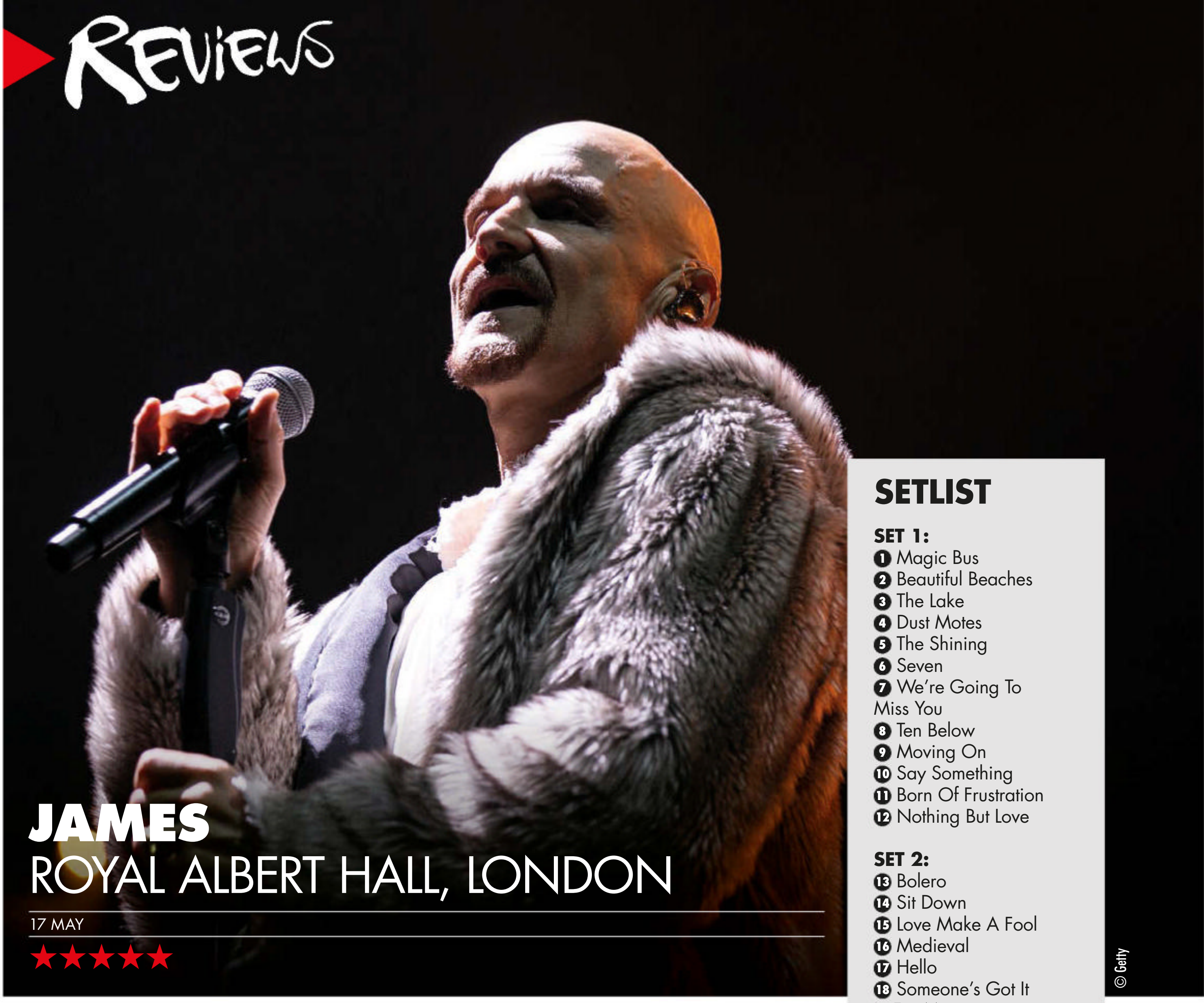
ENCORE 1:
21. In Your Eyes

ENCORE 2:
22. Biko

THE GIG CARTEL







© Getty

JAMES
ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON

17 MAY

★★★★★

SETLIST

SET 1:
1. Magic Bus
2. Beautiful Beaches
3. The Lake
4. Dust Motes
5. The Shining
6. Seven
7. We're Going To Miss You
8. Ten Below
9. Moving On
10. Say Something
11. Born Of Frustration
12. Nothing But Love

SET 2:
13. Bolero
14. Sit Down
15. Love Make A Fool
16. Medieval
17. Hello
18. Someone's Got It In For Me
19. Alaskan Pipeline
20. She's A Star
21. Just Like Fred Astaire
22. Getting Away With It (All Messed Up)
23. All The Colours Of You
24. Many Faces

ENCORE
25. Hymn From A Village
26. Tomorrow
27. Sometimes

MANCHESTER'S INDIE DARLINGS CLOSE OUT THEIR 40TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR WITH A RAPTUROUS SINGALONG

It's been touch and go – Tim Booth has spent the week laid low with the flu, and trumpeter Andy Diagram has broken his foot – but they've made it: James have arrived at a sold-out Royal Albert Hall for the final night of their 40th anniversary orchestral tour.

While Diagram hobbles on stage on crutches, dressed in a white gown – it's not clear whether he's come as a bugling angel, or straight from the hospital – Booth begins the show in the stalls, picked out in his own heavenly halo as he sings *Magic Bus*, from 2021's *All The Colours Of You* LP. If he's suffering any ill-effects of his recent sickness, it doesn't show: his voice rings out strong and clear in the vast space, and he's barely made it onstage before breaking into his trademark 'ecstatic dancing'.

The venue is a fitting one for a live show that sees close to 40 performers on stage, the nine-strong band augmented by the Orca 22 Orchestra and the Manchester Inspirational Voices choir. Unlike some rock-orchestral hybrids, where the classical elements end up fighting for room, James have radically reimagined one of pop's best catalogues, with results that are often transcendental.

"As tickets sold out so quickly, we figured you were rabid fans," jokes Booth, of 30-year-old B-side *The Lake*'s inclusion in tonight's setlist. And there is indeed an element of worship in the air, with the next deep cut, *Dust Motes*, heard in hushed, reverent silence.

For *Say Something*, the singer goes walkabout again, standing on a seat (is that allowed at the Royal Albert Hall?) before the audience picks up the song and carries it into those famous rafters. By the end, we're all on our feet, and when the band launches into *Born Of Frustration*, assisted by 5,000 voices hollering along with the woo-woos and la-la-las, the atmosphere is one of pure euphoria.

The second half of the show begins with Booth pretending to (mis)conduct the orchestra, like some lost Morecambe and Wise skit, before segueing into a stripped-back *Sit Down*, in which he and impressive co-vocalist Chloe Alper float above a graceful swoon of violins. Such restraint is in striking contrast to new song *Love Make A Fool* – where everyone on stage joins in with stomping and clapping to create a thunderous, thrillingly percussive racket – before *She's A Star*, reimagined as a lilting waltz, inspires another mass singalong that, from this point, never really lets up.

Encore opener *Hymn From A Village*, from way back in 1985, is an appropriate way to mark four decades since James' emergence from Whalley Range, while *Tomorrow*'s enduring optimism perhaps serves as a reminder that life can also begin at 40.

The evening closes with an exhilarating version of *Sometimes* in which band, orchestra, choir – who've now moved upstage to lead the party – and audience conspire to make actual magic. "How long shall we sing this for?" asks Booth, as the crowd shows no sign of flagging. Honestly? We could go on all night, Tim. **Paul Kirkley**

RAVE NEW WORLD: CONFESSIONS OF A RAVING REPORTER

KIRK FIELD

NINE EIGHT BOOKS

★★★★

Given the reports of stabbings and murders outside nightclubs in recent years, it's hard to believe now that the media's portrayal of the rave scene in the late 80s bordered on hysteria.

A generation of young people who wanted nothing more than to dance – but were forced to take to farmer's fields and warehouses – were vilified on a weekly basis via greatly exaggerated reports. The fact that any actual criminal behaviour was minimal compared to today, shows exactly how skewed the portrayal was.

Kirk Field's fantastic account of the dance revolution from the inside does a superb job of setting the record straight. After literally falling into his role as "raving reporter" for clubbing bible *Mixmag*, Field set off on a transcendental trip that took him all over the world to write about some of the most monumental moments of club culture, all documented here in exhilarating fashion.

Relaying how the scene grew from muddy fields and word-of-mouth warehouse parties to some of the world's most exotic locations, all with a supporting cast of unbelievable characters, *Rave New World* is an intoxicating love letter to one of music's most misunderstood eras. **Mark Lindores**

BOWIE ODYSSEY 73

SIMON GODDARD

OMNIBUS PRESS

★★★★

As Bowie fans can attest, there's been no shortage of material published about the Starman since his death seven years ago. From biographies to photobooks, the tomes have kept coming – each attempting to outdo the last. The difference with *Bowie Odyssey 73*, the fourth in Simon Goddard's scintillating series, is that it succeeds where so many others have failed.

With its meticulous fact-checking and almost poetic prose, Goddard paints a beautifully written portrait that's almost as otherworldly as its subject. While Goddard's previous instalments have been just as invaluable, the fact that 1973 was such an exciting period for Bowie with Ziggy Stardust's retirement, as well as the release of *Aladdin Sane* and *Pin-Ups*, elevates the series even further here, transporting the reader to the centre of the mass hysteria that swirled around his every move. From the front rows of concerts to parties and premieres, Goddard strikes the perfect balance in juxtaposing Bowie's own hedonistic world with that of his many idol-worshipping acolytes.

With each of the 10 books in this planned series focussing on an individual year, the author has the scope to really home in on the detail, granting us an access-all-areas pass to accompany Bowie to every gig, every engagement, and to some of the most important moments in rock history. What an extraordinary ride. **ML**

LISTEN TO MY HEART: LIFE, LOVE & ROXETTE

MARIE FREDRIKSSON WITH HELENA VON ZWEIGBERGK

1984 PUBLISHING

★★★½

It's easy to forget what a force Roxette were when they arrived in the late 80s. Thanks to a string of hits including *The Look*, *Listen To Your Heart*, *Joyride* and *It Must Have Been Love*, the Swedish duo of Per Gessle and Marie Fredriksson achieved international success lasting 30 years and remain the second most successful act in their homeland behind Abba.

From 2002 until her tragic death in 2019, Marie navigated life in Roxette alongside a solo career whilst battling severe illness brought on by her diagnosis of a brain tumour.

Originally published in Swedish in 2015, Marie's autobiography *Listen To My Heart* is now finally translated into English to celebrate her remarkable achievements but also her determination to sustain that career for as long as she possibly could.

Intensely personal, the book is akin to reading Fredriksson's diary and packed with both onstage recollections and various behind-the-scenes experiences.

While her remarkable strength with life's challenges is undoubtedly admirable, reading her words now comes with an inescapable sadness of the eventual outcome. Nonetheless, this is a poignant account of a story that was cut tragically short. **ML**

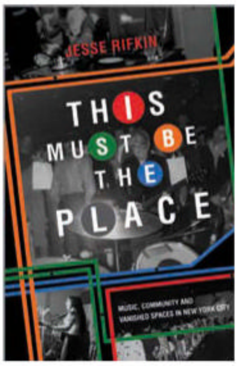
THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

JESSE RIFKIN

HANOVER SQUARE PRESS

★★★★

Whatever the genre, be it jazz, folk, punk, disco, hip-hop or alternative, all musical scenes are a product of their environment – and no place has played a more integral role in shaping its aural output than that of New York City. This notion provides the premise for Jesse Rifkin's superb tour of the city and its influence on music over the past 60 years.



Exhaustive in its attention to detail, *This Must Be The Place: Music, Community And Vanished Spaces In New York City* is an enlightening escapade through the mean streets of the Big Apple, which veers far off the beaten track of renowned venues to infiltrate the urban underbelly of the concrete jungle. Sure, we may take in CBGB, Max's Kansas City, Studio 54 and the Hotel Chelsea et al, but we also see them in a different light here. Max's Kansas City, for example, was the setting for many a debauched night but also doubled up as a diner for office workers by day.

Outside of the big-hitters, Rifkin takes us behind the doors of numerous other seemingly innocuous addresses and lays bare their musical histories, thanks to a wide array of interviews with their inhabitants and attendees.

While the phrase 'If these walls could talk' could be attributed to almost all of the culturally rich locations that feature in *This Must Be The Place*, Rifkind finally gives them the voice to do so. **ML**

SADE RELEASE DIAMOND LIFE

16 JULY 1984

Few debut records ever walk away with the BRIT Award for Best British Album, but then few are as assured and accomplished as *Diamond Life*.

Sade had formed from the ashes of another band, the Latin-soul outfit Pride, performing their first gig in 1982. By 1983, the band – consisting of frontwoman Sade Adu, plus Stuart Matthewman, Paul Denman, Andrew Hale and Paul Anthony Cooke – had signed to Epic and started work on recording what would become their masterpiece.

Amazingly, the ink was barely dry on their contract when they assembled at London's Power Plant with producer Robin Millar, having never even been in a recording studio before. Four singles would be spun from the album, *Your Love Is King* (UK No.6), *When Am I Going To Make A Living* (No.36), *Smooth Operator* (No.19) and *Hang On To Your Love*, while the LP itself would peak at No.2 on home soil.

Diamond Life would go on to shift over 10 million copies worldwide (even making No.5 on the US Billboard 200), becoming one of the top-selling debut albums of its era and the best-selling debut LP by a British female vocalist, a record that stood for 23 years until it was beaten by Leona Lewis' *Spirit*. There's much to love in Sade's next LP, too, the chart-topping *Promise*, but *Diamond Life* remains the band's signature work. There's no soul smoother, no sophisti-pop more sophisticated and no jazz more mellow than this album which seemed to soundtrack every high-end dinner party in 1984. **Steve O'Brien**

© Alamy

STEVEN JONES & LOGAN SKY

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